

# Diamond Cut Diamond

By Adolphus Trollope



Chatto & Windus Piccadilly.









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*AND OTHER STORIES.*

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# DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND:

*A STORY OF TUSCAN LIFE;*

AND OTHER STORIES.

By T. ADOLPHUS TROLLOPE.



*A NEW EDITION.*

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CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY

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DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.



# DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND:

## *A STORY OF TUSCAN LIFE.*

### CHAPTER I.

THE question whether old Domenico Rappi was a fortunate and happy man or otherwise would be answered differently, no doubt, by different persons, according to their diverse estimates of what things are most desirable in this world. He was a "fattore," as it is called in Italy—a bailiff, as we should say, for want of a better translation, though that word does not quite satisfactorily express the meaning of the Italian one. A bailiff usually manages the estate of one single employer. A "fattore" often has the superintendence of several estates belonging to more than one owner. The connexion of the "fattore" with the land-owner is less close than that of a bailiff with the person who employs him. He almost always manages the property of an absentee landlord; for Italians do not like to live in the country when it is in their power to live in the capital, or even in a provincial city. He is thus more independent, and more at liberty to live his own life as it pleases him. And, somehow or other, a prolonged observation of the progress of social life in Italy almost always leads the observer to the conclusion that it is in the nature of things for "fattori" to become gradually richer, while landlords become gradually poorer.

To begin with, then, Domenico Rappi, the fattore, may so

far be considered to have been fortunate in his position in life. He was further fortunate in the locality his fate had assigned to him. The large property he managed was situated in the Casentino, as that upper valley of the Arno is called through which the classic stream runs, when first it descends from its birthplace in the Apennines. It is a land flowing with milk and honey. It has been celebrated by Dante for the beauty and abundance of the rills which water it. The name indicates that, from the very earliest ages, it was famed for its dairy produce. It is a land of Goshen, entirely shut in by ranges of the Apennines on all sides. There is no large town within its borders to disturb the purely pastoral character of its scenery and population. And the locality has always been a specially favourite one with the Tuscans. Surely *fattore Rappi* was fortunate in that his lines had fallen in such pleasant places. He was yet further fortunate in having gathered together such a stock of this world's goods as to place him and his far out of the reach of care for the morrow, and to render him the most important personage in his native village and its neighbourhood. Fortunate, too, in enjoying a large share of the esteem and respect of his neighbours. And, lastly—for the list of his good fortunes is not yet finished—he was fortunate in himself and his personal constitution. He had been a remarkably handsome young man, and was, at the period to which this narrative relates, a remarkably handsome old man: hazel eye, still bright; flowing white hair; sweet-tempered mouth, with perfect ranges of brilliantly white teeth; a large, jolly-looking, florid face; a tremendous breadth of chest, which was invariably covered by a dazzling extent of scarlet waistcoat; and a sound constitution, perfect digestion, and unfailing health and activity. And yet it has been written that it might be questioned whether this richly-gifted *Domenico Rappi* was or was not a fortunate man.

What did the *per contra* consist in? What was the nature of the ill-fortune that could avail so to counter-

balance all the above-rehearsed elements of good, as to make it doubtful which scale might ultimately be found to kick the beam?

Fattore Rappi had a wife!—a circumstance that of course ought to have been the crowning completion of his felicity; but it was not so.

Olivia Marini had, some six-and-twenty years before the time with which this narrative concerns itself, been the recognized queen of beauty in all the valley of the Casentino, when the handsome and well-to-do fattore, who was about ten years her elder, wooed and won her for his bride. But Olivia's beauty was by no means her only dower. She was the daughter of a fattore, who had, after the usual fashion of fattori, increased his store; and Olivia brought a comfortable addition of means to her husband. Now, inasmuch as words have been already said which are of a nature, perhaps, to prejudice the reader against the lady, it is as well to state at once that no breath of reproach had ever tarnished the fair fame of la Signora Rappi as regards those aspects of wifely duty which are generally considered to be the most important of all to matronly reputation. No man, and, what is more, no woman, had ever thought, said, or hinted that Olivia Rappi had a thought or a glance for any man other than her husband. Nor had any demon of unreasonable jealousy ever lodged a painful thought upon this subject in jolly farmer Rappi's easy-going brain. Still, therefore, we seem to come upon nothing in the fattore's lot but additional sources of prosperity and happiness. What could have been the peacock on the farmer's wall—the skeleton in the farmer's cupboard?

Drink? No! Scarcely a drunken man, and much less a drunken woman, is to be found among the Tuscan inhabitants of the central part of Italy. The abundant vineyards of the Tuscan hills yield their undoctored grape-juice to make glad the heart of man, and not, as among less happy populations, to make his misery. No! Fattore Rappi liked his

wine, was a first-rate judge of the quality of it, and would have gone to the stake rather than admit that his own product was not the best in the Casentino. But nobody had ever seen him the worse for liquor. As for the "fattoressa"—as a fattore's wife loves to be called—she was almost, if not quite, a teetotaler; not from any idea that there was any virtue in abstaining from wine, but because such had come to be her habit from motives arising out of other elements in her character.

Was it jealousy on his wife's part that made the bitter drop that spoiled the flavour of all the fattore's life-draught?

Not a bit of it! He gave his wife no cause for any such feeling; nor had she ever fancied that she had any such cause.

Was there any of the chronic ill-health in the farmer's household which sometimes has power to mar happiness that would otherwise seem complete?

Nothing of the kind! A heartier, healthier couple than Domenico Rappi and his wife it would have been impossible to find in all Tuscany. And Signora Rappi had made her husband the happy father of two handsome and perfectly healthy and well-constituted daughters. If all the rest of the world had needed the assistance of the faculty as little as the inmates of farmer Rappi's household, the doctors might as well have shut up shop at once.

The fattore had no son. But, though it may be that he would have liked that one of his children should have been of the coarser sex, this was not a cause of unhappiness to him—certainly was not *that* cause which has been alluded to as well-nigh neutralizing all the favourable ingredients in his cup of life.

No! As has been already hinted, it was his wife that was the source of trouble! Despite her virtues, it was the Signora Rappi who made her husband's life well-nigh a burden to him—despite her virtues, though these have not yet been all told. The *fattoressa* was economical and reli-



gious—and surely these are good qualities! Olivia Rappi was *very* economical and *very* religious. Well—surely there could not be much amiss in this! It is true that too much of a good thing is *not* good; and we can understand that economy may be pushed a little too far. But it may be feared that Protestant readers may be shocked at the notion of stigmatizing religious feeling, even in its excess, as a fault, and a source of trouble and sorrow. But any readers, who may be conscious of such a feeling, are requested to remember that Domenico Rappi and his wife were *not* Protestants; and that Roman Catholicism shows itself *very* differently in the countries of its native home, from the appearance it wears when transplanted into communities of Anglo-Saxon race.

Yes; this was the trouble—the bitter drop in his cup, that made it a question with the *fattore* whether he was not in truth a very unfortunate and unhappy rather than a fortunate and happy man. It was that his wife was a very religious woman.

And if my readers will kindly accompany me to the conclusion of this narrative, accepting my assurance that the incidents of it are by no means untrue or uncommon, they will see how that which is recognized as devout religious feeling and conduct in Roman Catholic communities, may in truth make the unhappiness of a father and husband, and take all the sunshine out of his life and out of his home.

Olivia, the *fattore*'s eldest daughter, was twenty-four years of age, and Giulia, his youngest, eighteen at the time our little family history commences. Both of them were girls on whom the eye rested with delight. On which of them it might love to linger with the greater pleasure and the richer association of ideas would depend on the temperament and mood of the looker; for, though both undeniably beautiful, they differed from each other remarkably. Olivia—to use the classical old English phrase—favoured her mother; Giulia, her father. The former was, as her mother had been, remarkably tall; and the pure, pale oval of her

face, showing ivory-white by the contrast with the heavy braids of her black hair, seemed the very ideal that a disciple of Beato Angelico might have chosen as a model for the Madonna. The features, though delicately cut, were so majestic in their habitual repose! There was so much of divinity in the passionless placidity of the face!—so much of angelic grace in the generally slow and deliberate movements of her person, and the dignified carriage of her figure! The suggestion of celestial purity and calm—unruffled by earthly passions, untouched by human littleness—was complete, as the charmed eye rested on the small head, a little bent forward on the long, slender neck, while the wonderfully long, black, silken eye-lashes drooped fringe-like over the large eyes.

And this was the *pose* which the judicious painter would have selected, by preference, as that in which Olivia was to figure forth the presentment of the Madonna. For when the long silken fringe of lash was wholly raised, there was something in those large and beautiful eyes which did not convey exactly the impression which our supposed painter was in search of—a something which did not altogether fulfil the Madonna-like promise of the general outline of the face. The impression in this sense was immediate; but it needed some little reflection before the observer could render himself an account of it. The large eyes in that white face were undeniably handsome, and very bright. Eyes surely should be bright. And it seems like the captiousness of the determined fault-finder in the old French story, who was reduced to the necessity of complaining at a wedding that the bride was too pretty, to say that Olivia's eyes were too bright. And yet that was likely to be the first impression of any one whose gaze had been attracted by that passionless purity of nature, which has been described, when Olivia raised her eyes to meet those of the observer. Or was it, perhaps, that the brightness was accompanied by a certain hardness—a steel-like glitter, which seemed incongruous with the calm

placidity of the outline of the face? Depth, also, is often predicated of an eye as an especial beauty. And it could not be said that Olivia's eyes had this mysteriously suggestive quality. Nor were they what could be called liquid eyes. We are told by the learned in such matters that there is no expression whatsoever in any human eye—that all the expression resides in reality in the forms and lines of those portions of the face which immediately surround the eye. But, if such be the case, it must be admitted that those forms and lines can be wholly changed by the mere dropping or raising of the eyelid. For in the case of Olivia Rappi the whole expression was altered by that sole difference. It was not that, when that large and glittering eye was fully revealed, the purity and passionlessness of the face, which was its most striking characteristic, was altered or defaced, but that some other things seemed to be added thereto. There was what seemed the outward expression of an unflinching strength of will. There was an unblenching steadiness in the glance that seemed to say that that serene calm would scarcely permit itself to be ruffled by any emotion, or by any prospect of suffering to itself—or to others. It never would have occurred to any physiognomist to call Olivia Rappi bold-eyed. She was rather, if such an expression may be permitted, retiring-eyed. Her eyes never came out to meet you either in hostility or affection. But if you sent yours to find them at home, you were apt to meet a something in them capable of producing in you either dislike, or uneasiness, or even fear, according to your temperament.

A skilled practitioner of Lavater's science might have remarked, too, of Olivia Rappi, that, just as the repetition of a bit of colour in any second part of a dress or a picture takes up and completes the effect intended to be produced by it, so the shape and expression of Olivia's mouth supplemented and completed that which has been attributed to her eyes. It was a handsome mouth, as surely as the eyes were handsome eyes; and yet—and yet—it was not, in a word,

one of those mouths which call forth human affections, and cause them to come welling up from other hearts to meet them. Not a coarse or a sensual mouth! oh, dear, no! The utmost possible reverse of that. An ascetic mouth, it might rather be said. The lips, though admirably chiselled and curved, were thin; and the mode in which they met each other was more indicative of firmness than of gentleness—spoke rather to the practised and understanding eye of the possibilities of certain spiritual sins than of any more earth-born proclivities toward bodily failings.

There was something, too, even in her beautiful and strikingly elegant figure which produced an impression analogous to that which has been attributed to Olivia's eyes and mouth—a kind of unbendingness—a slow-moving dignity of uprightness, which never was betrayed into an impulsive elegance or an impulsive awkwardness. Her hands and feet were not small, but long, as befitted her height; slender, and beautifully formed.

And all that Olivia Rappi has here been described to be, her mother had been, when from being Olivia Marini she became Olivia Rappi the elder. We all know, alas! too well, the kind of changes that years bring with them, for it to be necessary to say much in description of the *fattoressa* as she was when her eldest daughter was four-and-twenty. Of course, the hard, bright eye had become more hard and less bright—of course, the thin, curved lips had become more thin and less curved—of course, the slender, rigid waist had become less slender and more rigid—of course, those warning expressions of spiritual tendencies toward certain faults had become developed into hardly-marked and unmistakable manifestations of them. All this may easily be imagined; and nothing more, therefore, need be said at present respecting the Signora Rappi. But as nothing that has been set forth as to Olivia is in any degree applicable to her younger sister, it will be necessary to say a few words of little Giulia.

Giulia, as has been said, was eighteen when her sister was twenty-four years old. And if Olivia was, as the phrase goes, her mother's child, Giulia was as markedly her father's. Of course, it could not be said that the young girl of eighteen so completely repeated what her father had been at that age, as Olivia in face and person was a repetition of her mother. But there were such striking similarities of temperament, of complexion, of feature, between the jolly and handsome old *fattore* and his youngest daughter, as to suggest infallibly an equally strong resemblance in character and disposition.

And the presumption would have been found to be a perfectly correct one.

It was an often-debated moot point among the youths of the country-side which of the rich *fattore's* two daughters was the most lovely, the most fascinating. And so great was the difference of style and of the entire idiosyncrasy between them, that an experienced hand at such observations could have formed a shrewd opinion of the character and tendencies of any of the male population of the neighbourhood by ascertaining which of the two Rappi girls he most admired.

If Olivia might have sat to any painter of the Beato Angelico school for a Madonna, the first glimpse of Giulia suggested as emphatically to an artistic eye her special fitness to be the model for an Aurora. There was all the fresh, elastic, youthful gladness that should characterize the rosy-fingered goddess of the morn; the beaming, transparent innocence, too, in the dimpled cheek and laughing blue eye. Giulia's step, when she walked—if walking that could be called which rarely was subdued to the sober staidness of that form of motion—seemed really to realize the old classical image of a gait that did not bend the grass-blades beneath it. She had a wealth of light blonde hair of the silkiest and finest texture—too fine, indeed, for artistic hair-dressing purposes; for it could not be got to remain in any form

which the art of the *coiffeur* could assign to it; but *would*, with the slightest breath of air, constitute itself into a sort of glorified nimbus around the classically-shaped little head, that—very improperly—seemed to figure forth a saintly halo above the rounded temples of her whom we have likened to a heathen goddess.

And, indeed, this impropriety of the light-flying glossy tresses of film-like silk was often a source of trouble to the light-hearted owner of them. For grave and precise Signora Rappi, her dark-browed lady mother, would frequently manifest austere displeasure at this unarranged arrangement of the rebel locks in question. Whether the *fattoressa* had conceived the idea hinted at above, that her nymph-like daughter was unduly appropriating a saintly appendage to which, in her mother's opinion, she had not the smallest possible claim, may, perhaps, be doubted. But, for some reason or other, or from some feeling or other, the glancing aureole of golden gossamer of Nature's own arrangement around her daughter's head was an offence to the Signora Rappi, at which her severe eyes were scandalized. And then little Giulia, with an earnest protest as to her utter inability to make her stupid hair *stay* as her mother chose to have it, would, with a half-vexed, half-laughing pout, bind it all viciously in a tight knot at the back of her head, and—look more fascinatingly like a heathen goddess than ever. And then the *fattoressa* would frown more darkly than before. And her sister Olivia would observe gravely that it would be easy for Giulia to avoid all trouble with her hair, *if* she wished to do so, by simply tying a kerchief over it, closely fastened beneath the chin. And then the *fattore* would flare up with a "No! *I* bar that! Put your own head in a poke, Livia, if you like! But I like to see my little Giulia's bright hair; it's as good as a sunbeam to my old eyes! And I won't have it covered up!"

And so it would come to pass that poor little Giulia's troublesome hair came to be a source of domestic difference



in the *fattore's* home—one of the many sources, that is, with most of which Giulia was connected in some way or other. And, after such a little scene as the above, the consciousness of this would make Giulia sad, and her laughing eyes droop for a whole five minutes ! But she had one of those natures from which sorrow and trouble run off, as water does from a duck's back. It could make no lasting impression upon her. At the end of the five minutes she had no remembrance of the fact that she was under the shade of her mother's displeasure, and forgot to feel any grudge against Olivia for her sisterly suggestion.

Of course, enough has been said to let the judicious reader understand that Giulia Rappi was the very light of her father's eyes, his sunbeam in the house, *the* bright bit in his life. And the acquaintance which, it is hoped, he has made with the two sisters, will no doubt have sufficed already to explain in a great measure the nature of the doubts which hung around the question whether the *fattore* Domenico Rappi was or was not a happy man.

## CHAPTER II.

THOSE who have lived in either Italy or France sufficiently long to have become well acquainted with the ways of life and modes of feeling among those classes of the population which are not generally the first to come under a foreigner's observation, must have become aware, in the first place, how very general among the male sex is—if not settled unbelief in, at least—utter indifference to the religion of which they profess, in a certain loose way, to be members ; and, in the second place, how curiously and strangely the clergy accept this state of things. If a man makes no difficulty in allowing his wife and daughters to frequent the churches as assiduously as the clergy may wish—shows no objection to any intimacy between the priesthood and the female members of his house—

hold, and does not put himself prominently forward as a political opponent of the Church—the clergy of his parish will associate with him on friendly terms, discreetly and consistently “sink the shop” in their conversation with him, and appear to consider him to all intents and purposes a very satisfactory member of society. Of course, if the priest has any belief in his own theories and doctrines, he must consider his unconfessing and uncommunicating parishioner as infallibly lost to all eternity. But that consideration does not appear to vex the generality of the sacerdotal caste at all. It would really seem as if it had been agreed on all hands to conduct the religious affairs of the community on the assumption that the male sex—with the exception of the priesthood—had no souls at all, and consequently no concern whatever with any of the operations and arrangements which are so busily put in action for the benefit of female souls.

If, in truth, Domenico Rappi, that jolly *fattore*, was considered to have a soul of his own, and really to be as much immortal as his wife Olivia, the not at all jovial *fattoressa*, the difference, not only in the mode in which each of them regarded that fact for themselves, but also in the mode in which it was regarded by the official soul-managers of the community, and generally by the world in which they lived, was most singular. Nobody troubled themselves about old Domenico's soul—least of all the jolly *fattore* himself ! Nobody, unless we are to except, perhaps, the wife of his bosom. And her care in this matter seemed to manifest itself mainly—one may say solely—by endeavours to direct his outward conduct, not generally, but with reference to certain arrangements which were supposed to have influence on the prospects of certain other female souls. With the more immediate concerns of his own proper soul, Olivia, his pious wife, meddled as little as all the rest of the world.

Much the same remarks may be made with regard to the intercourse between the *fattore* and the official guardian of his spiritual affairs. Don Ignazio Verini, the “*priore*” (as

the parish priest of Marrolo, the "commune" in which Rappi lived, was entitled to call himself, by reason of some collegiate dignity belonging to his church, whereas otherwise he would have been simply the "curato")—Don Ignazio Verini belonged to that one of the well-distinguished categories into which the parish priests of Italy may be divided, which is more usually to be met with in the cities and in the higher ranks of the hierarchy. Leaving out of the question the thoroughly black sheep of the sacerdotal flock, who may be found sometimes in country parishes, but, it must be owned, more frequently in the pages of fiction-writers of a certain school—leaving them aside, the Italian parochial clergy may be classed under four categories:

First, and rarest, there is the earnest, fanatic, ascetic, doctrinal priest. He has generally a fair tincture of theological learning, and is quite wonderfully ignorant of aught else. He causes a great deal of mischief and unhappiness in his parish, and is entirely careless how much he causes, as being fully persuaded that human affairs in this vale of tears are supremely unimportant, save as they conduce, or do not conduce, to the leading of the actors in them into Paradise when their short sojourn here shall be at an end. He believes the generation in which he lives to be the worst and most hopeless that the world has yet seen, and considers that the only thing yet possible for a faithful priest in this lost age is to merit a distinguished place in a better world by the intensity of his hatred for the enemies of the Church in this, and perhaps to succeed in saving a few select (female) souls, together with his own.

Then, in the second place, and next rarest, it may be feared, comes the priest who is a real blessing to his parish, especially if it be a rural and somewhat poor one. He may be of the bookish and contemplative, or of the genial, hail-fellow-well-met type—more frequently in Italy of the latter. But in either case, by the force of temperament, this world and its concerns hold a larger space in his thinkings and plannings

and doings than the next world. He is not generally looked on very favourably by his ecclesiastical superiors, but is adored by his parishioners. He is probably a man of very little learning, but of strong and shrewd native common-sense. He performs all his sacerdotal functions, perhaps, in a somewhat perfunctory manner; but is always busy from morning till night with schemes and labour for the (temporal) benefit and comfort of this, that, and the other one, or for the entire body of his people. He would be much shocked at any suggestion that he was otherwise than perfectly orthodox in his beliefs. He accepts all that the Church teaches without examination or questioning; and, having so accepted it, neither thinks nor says anything more about the matter. Spiritual-minded persons would say that such an idiosyncrasy should have marked the man as eminently unfitted for the priesthood in any shape. But the spiritual-minded persons are few—fewer, probably, among the inhabitants of the old classic Latin land than among any other civilized nation on the face of the earth. Whereas, on the other hand, nowhere are there communities which stand more in need of the helping which may be rendered by a kindly will, joined to a modicum of knowledge, and directed by an active and practical spirit of plain, worldly common-sense.

Thirdly, and in strong distinction to the last class, the members of which are as little priestly as may be, are the priests who are all priest. They are more commonly met with in the cities than in the country. They are as entirely unspiritual as the men referred to above—indeed, more so. But they genuinely believe themselves to be wholly devoted to “spiritual interests” and “spiritual affairs.” And the matter is not one of hypocrisy at all, but simply of terminology. By “spiritual,” they mean belonging to or referring to the “Church,” and the ecclesiastical persons of whom they consider it to consist, in contradistinction to all that refers to or interests laymen and non-ecclesiastical persons. And when

this meaning of the word has been thoroughly understood and accepted, it may be admitted that the members of that class of the Romish priesthood of whom we are speaking are wholly and entirely devoted to spiritual affairs and interests. Protestants are apt, somewhat unphilosophically, to imagine that men of this stamp must be thorough-going, conscious hypocrites, using religion as a cloak for mere worldly ambition. But that is a mistake. In the first place, many a man of this sort would be content to live and die in the humblest subaltern obscurity, content that his name should no more be heard of than that of a private soldier in the ranks of a victorious army, if only he can add a stone to the Temple of his idolatry—if only he can spend and be spent in the great cause of Church supremacy. In the next place, his *beliefs*, such as they are, are genuine. He really believes that he believes all the teaching of the Church, and all her interpretations of Holy Writ. But what he does believe—with all his heart, and all his mind, and all his strength—is that it is a good and desirable thing that this world should be ruled and managed by the priesthood of his Church. He really believes himself to “love God,” and to be eager only in “His service.” And it is quite true, if you understand “God” and “Church” to be and to mean the same thing, and the “service” of the one to be the service of the other. They are men in whom, whatever department of life their lot might have been cast in, *esprit de corps* would have been the leading passion of their nature. That which is selfishness in its most ordinarily recognized form in other men, in them takes the form of inordinate love for their caste. Their pride is pride of caste. Their ambition is for the *corps* to which they belong. Their grasping greed is for the “Church.” How should the soul be soiled by such in a man who is himself content to live on a crust? Their unscrupulousness is for “God”—*i. e.*, for the Church. How can any means be unsanctified by such an aim?

This was the class of priests to which Don Ignazio Verini

belonged. He walked his course through the world tramping on human hearts, with a conscience not merely at rest, but thoroughly applaudive. Few men in the cause of their mundane ambition or greed could be so ruthless as he in what he deemed the service of God. For a silenced conscience may make some wail of remonstrance heard; but a conscience which has passed over with bag and baggage to the enemy avails simply to make the state of things worse than it would be were conscience wholly deadened.

To complete the classification suggested above, the fourth category of the sacerdotal class has yet to be named. It is in Italy—especially in Central and Southern Italy—the most numerous of all. It consists of the mass of very poorly educated, very narrow-minded men, to whom the priesthood is simply a means of finding bread. There are very many such in the rural parishes of Italy—men little above the peasants among whom they live in social standing or general cultivation, and not at all above them or different from them in origin. Of course, as in every other department of life, some of these men are well-meaning enough, and desirous of doing their duty as far as they know how to do it; and many are low-minded, depraved blackguards, ready to avail themselves of the opportunities afforded them by their sacred calling for any base or mischievous purpose. The majority are content to drone out their lives in laziness and ignorance, discharging the mechanical duties of their function in a perfunctory manner; not exercising intelligent thought upon any subject sufficiently for it to be said correctly that they either believe or disbelieve the doctrines they enunciate, and to whom the main objects of life are their daily food and daily repose.

Of course, this last is the class from which the remoter and poorer parishes are mainly supplied with clergy. But the same causes, connected with the circumstances of its original endowment, which gave to the church of Marrolo the title of "Collegiate," and to its incumbent that of



"Priore," made it a richer ecclesiastical prize than usually falls to the share of men of that stamp. And so it came to pass that Don Ignazio Verini, as has been said, was the parish priest of Marrolo.

Verini was a notable specimen of the type of priest who has been described under the third of the above four classes. As regards all those externals which are so important in all those departments of life in which it is needed that one man should exercise a moral influence over his fellows, Verini was, in the eyes of his ecclesiastical superiors, eminently "the right man for the place." A tall, personable, dignified-looking man, with a good forehead, a handsome though dry and severe mouth, a large, square chin, indicative of great power of will, a high, thin, rather hawk-like nose, a large, clear, pale eye, and crisp, curly hair, now beginning to be iron-grey. In matters still more external, the outward presentment of the priest was equally calculated to impose on the minds of his parishioners. His spare, alert figure, always as upright as that of a drill-sergeant, was invariably clad in a long, closely buttoned, cassock-like coat of the finest cloth and glossiest black. The mud-coloured high-lows, clasping ankles clad in coarse worsted stockings, as much brown as black, which form the more ordinary costume of the parochial clergy in remote rural districts, and which were exemplified in the person of his "Vicario," hereafter to be introduced to the reader, were not for Don Ignazio. His well-turned leg, protruding from below his black frock-coat, was incased in a black silk stocking, and his well-shaped foot in a neatly made and perfectly polished low-cut shoe with a large silver buckle. Nor did he ever give in to the easy-going modern abuse of wearing the ordinary layman's chimney-pot hat, but always mounted the large-flapped ecclesiastical, three-cornered hat of glossiest and fluffiest beaver. In a word, he was priest from the crown of his correctly-tonsured head to the tips of his absolutely straight-pointing and neither turned-out nor turned-in toes (for this, too, is a sacerdotal speciality): and

a crossing-sweeper might be mistaken for a field-marshal as easily as Don Ignazio could by any human eye be mistaken for anything but a Roman Catholic churchman.

One word more respecting this resplendent priest may be necessary to prevent the nature of his position in his parish from being mistaken. The world, especially the Protestant world, has heard much evil of the relationships that are said to be frequent between the members of a celibate clergy and their female parishioners. And mischief of this sort is undoubtedly far from uncommon. And the many circumstances which tend to make the intercourse between a priest and the female members of his flock more intimate and more frequent and more close than any which he holds with those of his own sex, not only very naturally lead to such mischief, but also very naturally lead to the suspicion of it in many cases where nothing of the kind exists. Of course the intercourse between priests and women must be close and intimate. It is on them that the priest operates. It is through them that he exercises his influence. They are the means of his power. It is for them and by them that he exists. For it is not too much to say that, but for the women, the whole edifice of Rome's priestly power would ere this have collapsed and crumbled to dust.

The connexion and intimacy accordingly between Don Ignazio and many of the female members of his flock was very close and confidential. But any suspicion of impropriety of the kind which the world is so prompt to conceive would have grievously wronged him. His heart was set on other matters! And so gravely dignified, so prudently circumspect was his conduct on all occasions, that it had never entered into the head of any human being in his own parish to imagine otherwise.

A certain amount of what—for want of a better term—may be called spiritual flirtation, a certain tone and manner of conversation with the young and pretty members of his flock, which produced in them results and emotions that could not

have been produced by one of their own sex—results and emotions very pernicious for *them*, but which left *him* as impassible as if he were marble—he was wont to permit himself—for the sake of the good cause; for the advancement of which, if they only could have known it, he would at any moment ruthlessly have ordered the youngest and the prettiest of them to the stake and the fagot, had it been needed, and had he possessed the power.

Such was Don Ignazio Verini, the Priore of Marrolo; and such was the nature of his relationship to his parishioners—in one respect at least, which it was desirable should be at once explained for fear of mistake and misconception.

### CHAPTER III.

It was on a lovely October afternoon that, as soon as the *fattore* had mounted his horse after his mid-day meal to ride over on business to the neighbouring town of Stia, Signora Rappi put on her best bonnet and gown, and set forth to pay a visit to the Priore.

Marrolo is one of the prettiest villages in the Casentino, which is so rich in pretty villages. It stands not very high above the bottom of the valley on the western hill, which shuts in the Casentino between the main backbone of the Apennines and that subsidiary range of mountains which Italian geographers call the Ant-apennines. Thus it faces toward the east, a little to the south; and the eye ranging delightfully from its terraced gardens, or from the windows of its dwellings, first over all the richly-cultivated plain of the valley, with the infant Arno shimmering in the midst of it, and then over the magnificent chestnut woods which clothe the lower slopes of the Apennines, reposes contentedly on the lofty peaks above them, in part bare and barren stone, and in part covered with pine forest. The whole of that part of the Apennine range which is seen from Marrolo was

once covered with forest; and the now hopelessly-barren parts are such because the forests have been many generations ago with improvident greed destroyed. For in these latitudes the autumnal and spring rains descend with such torrent-like force and abundance that, unless the soil is protected by the shelter of forest growth, the waters wash it all away—carry it in the process of years to the Mediterranean, where, after having for a few centuries caused much further evil by blocking up the water-courses and thus engendering malaria, it at last assumes the condition of rich alluvial corn-bearing plains, as now between the sea and Pisa, and becomes once again useful for the support and multiplication of man. In the meantime, nothing can be more utterly barren, void even of grass or verdure of any kind, than those parts of the mountain-tops from which the ancient pine forests have been removed. But large tracts of that part of the mountain opposite to Marrolo have retained their woods. And this inappreciable advantage has been due to a once wealthy and powerful community of monks who, from the eighth century downward, made these mountains their habitation. The evil occasioned to the world by monasticism has no doubt been greater than the good mankind has owed to the system. But the evil is pretty well known to and appreciated by the Protestant world in these days. The good is perhaps less entirely recognized. The monks of Camaldoli have been harried out of their mountain home on the Apennine within the last year or two. Doubtless it was on the whole best that it should be so. But the noble forests, which they for so many centuries preserved and cared for, remain a lasting monument to the superiority of their civilization, at least in some respects.

\* Don Ignazio Verini at all events feels this bitterly enough, as he looks across the valley to the opposite mountains from the windows of his comfortable parsonage; and often makes the contrast between the bare and barren peaks, which have been stripped by lay greed and improvidence, and the beau-

tiful and beneficent forests, which have been preserved by ecclesiastical wisdom and forethought, the theme of passionate diatribes on the superiority of a civilization under priestly rule to any other.

The house of the Priore was excellently well situated for observations leading to similar reflections. It had been originally close to, but not in contiguity with the church. But a chapel having been at some period subsequent to the building of the parsonage built on the bit of ground between it and the church, the three fabrics had now the appearance of being under the same roof; and the Priore could pass from his dwelling into his church without stepping outside of his own door. The church, with the priest's dwelling thus united to it, occupied a position with reference to the habitations of the little community which is very usual in the hill villages of Italy. It stood on the highest ground in the place. The "paese," as the Italian phrase is, occupied two streets, climbing the side of the hill, zigzag fashion, and having here and there sundry flights of stone steps to form short cuts between one and the other. Then above, and reached by a final set of steps at the uppermost end of the higher street, there was a platform, raised on a rocky eminence rising above the rest of the soil, which had been terraced up with supporting walls, and on which the church and parsonage had been built. There was thus in front of these buildings a little elevated "piazza," inclosed by a parapet wall on the side toward the valley, which was the accustomed place of rendezvous for all the gossips of the village on Sundays and other festivals. And in an Italian village, "all the *gossips*" might as well be written "all the inhabitants"; for assuredly it would be difficult to find an Italian man or woman, lad or lass, who does not deserve the epithet. And accordingly, either a little before or after the "funzione" in the church, pretty well the whole population of Marrolo might be found assembled on the piazza which has been described. And it must be admitted that it is

impossible to impugn their taste in the selection of a place of meeting. Certainly no chamber within the walls of Marrolo was half so pleasant as the piazza, with its lovely view and fragrant turf and flowers. And there the good "Marrolesi" would lounge by the hour together—the old men in one group, the old women in another; the lads on one side of the space, the lasses on the opposite side. For such is the wont of Italian rural populations. Whatever flirtations may be done, are never done in those latitudes under the eyes of assembled elders and compeers. Perhaps the symptom is not a favourable one.

Signora Rappi found the walk to the Priore's house a more fatiguing one than she could have wished. The fattore's well-to-do homestead was not exactly in the village, but a little more toward the bottom of the valley below it; and the October afternoon sun was still hot. And the Signora Rappi, though still in the prime of her years, and still a fine matronly figure, was beginning to feel a little short of breath, when she had, as was frequently the case, to climb to the dwelling of her spiritual director. If she had walked up the two zigzag streets, she would have accomplished her climb more easily. But she was eager on the errand on which she was bent, and had chosen the short cut up more than one steep flight of steps. And the result was that, when she reached the platform on which the church and the priest's house stood, one hand was pressed to her side, while the other was removing with a handkerchief the moisture from her brow; and a certain amount of exacerbation of the spirit had been caused by the annoyances of the flesh.

"Oh! Signora Rappi, is it you?" said old Assunta, the priest's servant, who came to the door in obedience to the visitor's knock; "what a hot walk you must have had!"

"Ah! you'd have said so, if you had walked up that hill from our farm! I declare, I think the hill grows steeper and longer than it used to be!" said the *fattoressa* crossly.

"It *is* changed since I knew it—or else I am—one or the

other of us," returned old Assunta with a grin and a wink, meant to punish her visitor for being out of humour.

"*You!* of course, *you* find most things changed, I should say! But I want to see the Priore. He is at home, I suppose. In short, I know he is; for I saw him ride by our place on his way home not an hour ago."

"Yes; his Reverence is at home. But he went to his writing directly he came in; and told me not to disturb him," said the old woman.

"He won't call it disturbing him, just to tell him that I've come up the hill, and would be glad to speak to him for a minute. I shan't keep him long," said the *fattoressa*, who had not quite yet recovered her good temper.

"I'm none so sure of that! I don't like to open his door when he has bid me not!" persisted the old servant.

"Let me open his door, then! I warrant he won't bite *me!*" urged the *fattoressa*, with a toss of her head.

"Well! you may go and knock at his study door, if you choose to! I've nothing to do with it!" growled old Assunta.

With this amount of permission, the Signora Rappi made her way to the door of the priest's sanctum, and, knocking sharply on the panel with her knuckle, was at once told to enter.

Don Ignazio was really engaged busily in writing. He looked up with an expression of irritation in his face as the door opened. But his brow immediately cleared when he saw his visitor; and, pushing the letter he had been writing from before him, he rose from his chair as he said:

"My good Signora Olivia! Have you walked up the hill at this hour? I hope nothing—?"

"No, your Reverence—nothing—that is, nothing new. Assunta would hardly let me come in to speak to you."

"Assunta cannot be trusted to make distinctions. It is true, I told her to let nobody come in. But, of course, that did not apply to you, my good Signora Rappi."

"Your Reverence is too good!—always too good to me!"

said the *fattoressa*, entirely mollified and restored to good humour.

"I was busy, it is true—a letter of importance to the Cardinal di Subiaco. But I could not have got it off by to-night's post; so I have plenty of time at your service, Signora."

The Priore *was* engaged in writing an important letter to the Cardinal di Subiaco. Don Ignazio was quite above telling little lies for the purposes of mere worldly courtesy. He was giving the Cardinal information respecting the hopes there might be of getting a certain measure of the Italian Government rejected in the Chamber of Deputies, a result which the clerical party were just then very intent on accomplishing. And at the moment Signor Rappi interrupted him, he was relating to his correspondent the result of his ride that morning; which had taken him to a neighbouring villa, the residence of a fair but frail lady, who was known (to the Priore, at least) to entertain sentiments for a certain liberal deputy of a nature which laws human and divine required her to feel only for her lawful husband; and who, being—despite of, or because of, her failings—a very religious lady, and very desirous of the consolations of the confessional, had been, in very discreet and judicious terms, given to understand that the comfortable whitewashing she wished could be granted, plenarily and amply, on condition of the fair sinner accomplishing for the glory of God and the Church so desirable a good work as the conversion of her friend the deputy's vote to the right side on the occasion in question. "And this, as your Eminence perceives, would leave us only five more voices to gain in that godless assembly to attain our object."

Such was the uncompleted letter which the Priore, first carefully placing the sheet between the leaves of his blotting-book, pushed aside from before him, as, motioning his visitor to take a seat, he resumed his own, and prepared to hear what she had to say to him,



"There's nothing new, as I told your Reverence; and that's the same as saying there's nothing good to be said," commenced the fattoressa, with a deep sigh. "Giulia is going on worse than ever! And how to rule her I don't know! I don't know what the world is coming to, for my part! Things were not so when I was a girl!"

"What can you expect, my dear Signora Rappi, in times like these? With heresy and hatred to God's Church in high places, with the clergy trodden down and persecuted and despoiled, how can we expect wholesome authority to maintain itself, or reverence or obedience to be found anywhere! Has your daughter Giulia specially offended?"

"The worst is, I see no hope of guiding her. And her father—you know the difficulties I have to struggle with. Yesterday evening Olivia and I were in the linen-room, looking over the presses. I had a sheet in my hand, that looked as if there were more knots in the spinning than there should have been, and, as the light was failing, I stepped to the window with it to hold it up to the light, and what should I see down in the yard but that baggage, Giulia, standing with her shoulder leaning against one side of the door of the bullock-stable, while that reprobate, Carlo Sparti, was standing just in the same way against the other door-post—not a braccio between them! '*Santa Madonna!*' I cried, crossing myself, your Reverence! Olivia ran to the window and saw it too! And that was not the worst! For Olivia, like a good and prudent girl, as she is, did not lose a moment, but dashed out of the room and down the staircase, to catch her sister in her disobedience. But there at the back door of the house leading into the yard she found her father standing as quiet and contented as possible! 'Where's Giulia?' says Olivia. 'There she is coming across the yard to the house,' says Rappi. 'But somebody has just left the yard,' says Olivia. 'Yes, Carlo Sparti has just gone out by the gate into the road. I bid him good-night not half a minute ago,' says Rappi, as quiet as possible. So that you see, your

Reverence, the impudent hussy must have been philandering with the fellow under her father's very eyes, and he never so much as opening his mouth or lifting a finger to stop her! And if that's the way things are to go on, there is no saying what end they may not come to. So I thought I would come to your Reverence for a word of advice."

"And you did quite right, as you always do, my dear Signora Rappi. My best advice and help is, you know, always at your service. In the first place, we must not despair, or be impatient; but struggle steadily toward our good aims, with perseverance and trust in God's good Providence. We know that Giulia is light-minded, vain, and disobedient—a thoroughly worldly temperament and disposition. It is a nature that needs much chastening to save it from perdition. But we have known all this before now; and, as you are aware, it is that knowledge that has led me to the conclusion that the cloister would be the best and safest home for her."

"I quite know that, your Reverence. But what likelihood is there that we shall be able to get her into a convent, with her father abetting her as he does, and she with this animal of a Sparti running after her, and she encouraging him?"

"Patience, and trust in Providence, my good Signora Olivia," said the Priore, with a bland smile, and laying his hand on the back of the *fattoressa's*, which was lying spread upon the table. "Of course, I need not tell you that we should not dream of placing this giddy girl in a convent against her will. God forbid! There must be a vocation. But see, now, how the providence of God works to bring good out of evil. It is this very silly love-fancy which will, in all probability, shape her will to the desired end. There is nothing so efficacious as disappointment in a silly, godless whim of this sort, to produce in such a nature as Giulia's a vocation for a religious life. It is a means which Providence uses again and again. There is not a convent in existence that

does not owe to such working of the Holy Spirit many of the most beautifully-devoted lives it shelters.”

“Disappointment! but where is the disappointment to come from? I am sure I don’t see—with her father a-going on as he does.”

“Once more, dear Signora Olivia, patience and faith! Patience and faith! See, now—it really turns out as if it were intended to rebuke your want of faith, my good Olivia! See, now, how Providence works! What should you say if I had found the means of getting rid of this pestilential fellow Sparti for good and all? Listen! You remember what a to-do there was at the time of the godless conscription last year about a certain *refrattario*,\* whom the police and the gendarmes failed to catch—Paolo Torre his name was. Do not you remember all about it?”

“Sure I do, your Reverence! There was more trouble than enough about it,” said the *fattoressa*, who, like all those of the clerical party, or under the influence of the clergy, especially detested and abused the conscription, knowing very well that her priestly friends were always plotting to defeat the provisions of it.

“Well, they have never caught Paolo Torre yet; and the Government is extremely vexed at its failure. Now it so comes to pass that I have discovered reasons to think that this Carlo Sparti was concerned in hiding this man and helping him off. And I am disposed to think that he will be wanted in Florence before long, and that it is likely to be a long while before Marrolo is troubled with him any more. Did I not speak well, Signora, when I said to you—Have faith in Providence?”

“To think of that! That would be a blessing, indeed! But how came one of their own side, an out-and-out liberal like that fellow Sparti, to take any part in hiding a con-

\* The young men who abscond and hide to avoid being taken by the conscription are so called.

script ? That was doing our work for us," said the *fattoressa*, much puzzled.

When she said "our work," she spoke of the party generally to which she and the priest belonged. For certainly the old *fattore*, who troubled himself little about politics in any way, would not have taken any part in any such disobedience to the laws, or have permitted his wife to do so in his own house. The *fattoressa* was quite right in saying that the concealment of fugitive conscripts, and the persuading of them to fly, too, as she might have added, were the work of the black or clerical party.

For all reply to the good dame's question, the Priore contented himself with gently bending his head with a bland smile, as he said, "Providence works with all sorts of instruments, Signora mia ! and there may have been all sorts of reasons for this Sparti's conduct. This Torre may have been a special friend of his—a creditor, perhaps. How can I tell what reasons he may have had for befriending the man in his time of need ? It is enough for us to know that Sparti will soon be removed out of our way, and to be thankful accordingly. Then, when all hope of ever seeing her lover again is judiciously taken from this silly girl, the best results may be expected."

"But you don't know, your Reverence, how many troubles and difficulties I have to struggle with. There's Rappi has no more religion than a Turk. And I am afraid he will be very stiff against letting the girl take the veil."

"Dear Signora Olivia," said the priest, again laying his hand upon that of the *fattoressa*, and smiling blandly, "we must not complain of the position in which God's providence has placed us, but strive to do His work in it, making the best we may of the materials He has put into our hands. Signor Rappi is a very worthy man—a very excellent man ! And if he has not yet attained to that earnestness in religious matters which we could wish, we may not doubt that in the Lord's good time he will seek rest and safety in the loving

arms of the Church. In the meantime a truly religious wife may do much—very much. The constantly dropping water will, as we all know, wear away a stone. And by being urgent, not overmuch, but *constantly*, in season and out of season, a really devoted wife may work a similar miracle. The surest guarantee for domestic peace and happiness is, as of course we know, a truly religious frame of mind and a loving submission to the Church. A good wife should make her husband feel this truth—should, with gentle perseverance, persuade him that domestic peace and happiness are only to be found for him in such frame of mind and such submission.”

“Indeed, your Reverence, I do my best! And if it was not that a man can always put on his hat and just walk out of the house, I do sometimes think I should bring him round,” said the *fattoressa*, who comprehended her mission as thoroughly as if she had been told in so many words to worry her husband’s heart out, and make his life a burden to him.

The Priore passed his hand over the lower part of his face; but there was a momentary twinkle in his eyes which might have told a shrewder observer than the good *fattoressa* what the expression of the mouth was which the prudent hand concealed.

“*Eh bene, cara mia*, persevere! Have faith and patience and hope. And be sure I am watchful for your welfare. So now, if you will excuse me, I will finish my letter to his Eminence of Subiaco.”

Whereupon the Priore gracefully extended his hand, muttered a rapid benediction, and then bowed a courteous adieu to his guest.

The *fattoressa* stooped to kiss the priest’s hand, then, retiring a step, made a profound reverence, and left the room to have a chat with old Assunta before walking down the hill in the cool of the gloaming.

## CHAPTER IV

It may be admitted at once that all the accusations which the fattoressa had brought against her daughter Giulia in her conversation with the Priore were perfectly true. It was quite true that she was guilty of disobedience; for she had been bidden by her mother never to speak to that pestilent liberalone Carlo Sparti again. And it was true that while the fattoressa and her exemplary Madonna-like elder daughter had been on the previous evening engaged in that dearest of all occupations to the heart of a thrifty Tuscan housewife—the review and refolding of the enormous stock of linen, the produce of Heaven knows how many years of assiduous domestic spinning—the truant Giulia had been engaged exactly as her mother had described. True, also, that she had been detected in the act of her disobedience just in the manner that had been described to the priest.

And there had been a special aggravation to the fattoressa's feelings in the fact that Giulia should have chosen to absent herself on that particular occasion, and from that particular occupation in which the Signora Olivia was on that evening engaged. An enormous and quite wonderful store of linen is the great pride and glory of a well-to-do Tuscan housewife's heart. Huge cupboards and presses full of this product of domestic industry are to her what his hoarded chests of gold are to a miser—as lovingly treasured, as certain never to be put by her to use. For, indeed, the quantity of her treasures makes this impossible. In many a wealthy fattore's house more linen is stored away than he or his can ever use in the course of the longest life. The good woman at her marriage probably has brought a goodly store with her—the produce of the spinning of a whole generation, or perhaps of two generations. And she assiduously labours during her life to increase the store, and compels her daughters to do the same, as soon as she has any old enough.

In strictness of speech, it may be remarked that this prized produce of female industry is *not* linen, since the thread is spun from the hemp filaments which the central districts of Italy produce in great perfection and fineness. The spinning only is done at home; and, as it is upon the perfection of that operation that the evenness and smoothness of the cloth depends, it may easily be understood how much of pride and rivalry goes to the displaying of the hoarded treasures.

It was thus a special offence to the Signora Rappi that her youngest daughter should be so careless of the glory of the family, so little interested in what should have interested her to the highest degree, as to have absented herself from the great revision of the family treasures.

Of course, her sister Olivia had felt aggrieved to at least an equal extent. Nothing is more exasperating than when one is acting with irreproachable virtue one's self, to see other persons very manifestly enjoying themselves, not only despite of, but absolutely by reason of their wicked neglect of the duty one's self is performing. And Giulia was very manifestly enjoying keenly her flirtation with that reprobate, Carlo Sparti. And then, when she was at least going to have the enjoyment of catching her sister in the forbidden delight, and treating her accordingly, to find that it had all passed under the ægis of her father's presence, which made it impossible to say all the things that Olivia was burning to say, and to make the insinuations that she was eager to make—and, indeed, impossible to enjoy her triumph, or say anything at all for the nonce, seeing that it must have been heard by the *fattore*. It was too provoking.

And then there were other matters which had of late been producing a considerable degree of irritation in the mind of the saint-like Olivia against her more mundane younger sister. In the neighbouring commune to Marrolo there lived a certain Simone Bossi, a landowner, dwelling on his own acres, and a wealthy man—nobody knew how wealthy a man; for old Simone, his father, had died about two years

before, leaving only one son, the heir not only to his land, but to all the savings of a long and penurious life. In fact, young Simone Bossi might have been considered quite a "Signore," instead of a member of the class of farmers, and *fattori*, and the like; might have been so considered, had he been blockhead enough to go away to Florence, and leave his paternal acres to the care of a *fattore*, instead of cultivating them himself, as his father had done before him. But Simone knew a trick worth two of that. He saw how the substance of his neighbour *fattore* Rappi grew and increased at the cost of his fellow landowners, and sagely determined that he would remain a *contadino*, and that his land should enrich nobody but himself.

Now old Simone Bossi, the father, had, in addition to his own land, held a certain farm from the monks of Camaldoli, as his father had done before him, and his grandfather, and many generations past. As usual in such cases, the land was held on very easy terms, and the farm might almost be said to have become the property of the Bossi family at a quit-rent. But then came the Italian Revolution. The monks were turned out. Their domains became the domains of the State. The value of the land, and the terms on which it was held, were looked into, and—Simone Bossi was summoned to give up the farm, or pay about twice as much for it as he had previously paid to his old easy landlords. He chose the former alternative—it may readily be understood with what sort of feelings towards the Revolution, and the new order of things, and the new government. Of course the Bossi, father and son, became the most thorough-going partisans of the retrograde, black, or priestly party.

And from this disposition of things sundry indirect consequences were likely to follow. For it would be a great mistake to suppose that a due acquaintance with theologic doctrines and ecclesiastical history and arrangements would suffice to enable one to understand the functions and position of a Roman Catholic priest as he exists in Italian society.



There are many matters which especially belong to his department that have no reference to religious doctrine or religious practice. Match-making for one thing is—or, rather, as it is rapidly becoming more correct to say, *was*—quite a recognized function of the priest's position in society. In the case of the aristocracy, this business would fall not so much into the hands of the parish priest as into those of the chaplain or priestly hanger-on of the great family. In the lower, and especially in the more rustic circles of society, much of this nuptial go-between business fell to the share of the parish priest. If marriages are made in heaven, who so fit to be the master of ceremonies on the occasion as Heaven's minister?

Now it will be easily understood, from what has been said above, that young Simone Bossi, the only son of his niggardly father, was a "capital good match"—by far the best match at that time in all the Casentino!—understood, moreover, that such a member of the diminished flock of the faithful sons of Mother Church was likely to be cared for with quite special interest by Mother Church's servants and ministers. And what a deplorable thing it would be if all this wealth and power and influence should be lost to the good cause!—as it well might be should this young Simone fall into the hands of a godless wife—a wife, that is to say, *not* duly under the thumb of an ecclesiastical director. The phrase here used—"fall into the hands of a wife"—is the proper one to express the nature of the danger; for Simone Bossi could not reckon among the good gifts wherewith he was endowed much power of intellect or strength of will and character. He was docile enough in the hands of his priestly pastors and masters. But might he not be equally so in the hands of a wife? So that it will be seen at once how very necessary it was that due care should be taken betimes to mate him judiciously in this point of view—with a wife, that is, who should be as entirely in the hands of the priests as himself.

And where could a girl be found so completely answering to all the exigencies of the case as Olivia Rappi, the daughter of

the rich *fattore* of Marrolo? She and her mother were as completely and thoroughly enslaved to the will of "the Church"—that is, in their case, to the will of Don Ignazio Verini, their parish priest—as the most despotic churchman could desire. Olivia was more than sufficiently attractive in person to make it no very difficult or up-hill task to cause the young man to fall in love with her. And two birds would be killed by the ecclesiastical stone that should be so thrown as to make Simone Bossi and Olivia Rappi man and wife; for thus at least one-half of the rich *fattore's* wealth would be also secured to the uses of the good cause. And if to this stroke of good management could be added the further success of so contriving things that the *fattore's* other daughter, who was, as we know, not of the right sort at all, should be driven into a convent, why all, or nearly all, the Rappi riches would be added to the Bossi riches, and Mother Church would have a very potent finger in the use of all of them.

Nothing was easier than to set all the first portions of these desirable arrangements in good train. But to get poor Giulia into a convent might be somewhat more difficult; for there was not only her own utter aversion to such a destiny, but her father in the way. Don Ignazio Verini, however, had brought about more difficult things than that in his day, and by no means despaired of success. As for the rest—to bring Simone and Olivia together—to engage all the influence of the girl's mother, and to obtain the admission from her father that the match was a very proper and unobjectionable one—to bring the young lady herself, though of course less avowedly, to a similar opinion—all was plain sailing to the priestly pilot.

But it so turned out that before long a small rock was discovered right ahead, which, though not sufficiently dangerous to give much alarm to so skilled a navigator, was yet such as to require some careful steering. In fact, it had never occurred to the busy Priore or to Signora Rappi that, in bringing young Simone Bossi into the society of Olivia Rappi,

they were at the same time exposing him to the fascinations of the unregenerate Giulia. And troublesome symptoms soon began to manifest themselves to the vigilant maternal eye, which seemed to point to a suspicion that Simone was inclined to make love to the wrong girl. There was nothing very strong or violent in his demonstrations of this sort. In the first place, it was not in him to make violent love to any girl; and in the next place, he knew very well that he had to marry Olivia—that he must not dream of marrying Giulia—and that he had no more the courage or the thought of rebelling against his spiritual pastor, and declaring that his soul was his own, in such sort as would be involved in his refusing Olivia, the saint, and wooing Giulia, the sinner, than he had of hanging himself.

But, despite all this, that unregenerate gold-coloured nimbus floating around the laughter-loving Giulia's mundane little round head, and the saucy glances of those bright blue eyes, did avail to draw aside Simon from his due allegiance to a degree which occasioned some little disquietude in the *fattore's* domestic circle.

For one thing, for instance, it will be understood that this culpable defection—or rather indication that he would fain be guilty of defection, if he dared—on the part of Signor Bossi, did not contribute to make Olivia regard her sister with kindly feelings. It is true that it would have been much worse if Giulia had given evidence of the slightest desire to secure Simone's attentions herself. On the contrary, she was always jeering at him, and turning him into ridicule. But this did not please Olivia either; but, on the contrary, seemed to exacerbate the irritation caused by the evidences of Simone's admiration. And then, again, there was the wickedness of having that other admirer, Carlo Sparti—a lover in no wise patronized by the Church—and giving every sort of evidence of liking it. And who does not know how trying it is to a devout mind of the nature of Olivia's, to experience the long tarrying of the judgments

that must fall—but don't—on the heads of happy, laughing sinners!

It would be very unjust to Olivia to allow it to be imagined that she was at all desirous that Carlo Sparti should make her the object of his attentions instead of her sister Giulia. A *liberalone*! A man without any due feeling of reverence for the Church! Fie! Olivia would have very soon sent him to the right about, with a flea in his ear. Indeed, she would have enjoyed having the opportunity of thus manifesting her opinion of him—if he would only have given her an occasion for doing so. But he never did. And that circumstance did not tend to soothe the irritated feelings of the Madonna-like Olivia.

There was still another point of view, in which the abominable flirtation between Giulia and Carlo was offensive to Olivia, besides the intrinsic wickedness of it, in itself so revolting to so well-constituted a mind as hers. The admirable arrangement so conducive to the interests of the good cause, and to which the approbation of that saintly man, the Priore, assured the blessing of heaven—that arrangement by virtue of which Olivia's dower was to consist of the whole of her father's worldly wealth, instead of half of it only, depended, as Olivia perfectly well understood, on her sister's taking the veil. And how was such a purpose at all consistent with what Olivia had seen from the window, when she and her mother had been engaged on the great revision of the linen stores? Was it not to be feared, on the contrary, that every time such scandalous and shameless goings-on were indulged in, the worldly mind of the rebellious girl would be rendered more and more averse from the holy calling which was before her? And to think that her father should quietly stand there, and see it all without making the slightest attempt at interfering, and should bid that animal Carlo good-night, just as if he would be perfectly happy to see him there again!

If the reader had seen the expression of Olivia's face as she rushed down the stairs to put an end to the abomination she

had witnessed, he would perhaps have been inclined to find fault with the description which called her features Madonna-like. But the expression of the loveliest features depends upon the nature of the emotions which are animating them. And now that all the causes which so reasonably contributed to ruffle Olivia's mind have been explained, it will be no wonder if there were things to be read in her which are not usually found in that of the Madonna.

It will also be understood how it had come to pass that the Signora Rappi had considered it so needful to pay a visit to her friend and counsellor, that she had not hesitated to toil up the hill to the parsonage under the rays of the afternoon - October sun.

## CHAPTER V.

WHAT made it all the wickeder that Giulia should behave as she did, showing herself altogether averse from the holy life to which her spiritual pastors and masters destined her, and, instead of that, inclining her mind and her ear to the perverse love-making of Carlo Sparti, was that this Carlo was in truth but a *contadino*.

Now the word "*contadino*," which literally translated means simply *countryman*, is an Italian social phrase technically used to signify one who cultivates land not his own. The term does not accurately correspond to the English word "*farmer*," because a farmer is one who hires land and pays rent for it. And such is not the system which prevails in Central Italy. The payment of rent for land, if not absolutely unknown, is very unusual in that part of the world. The prevailing system is called in Italian "*mezzeria*," which may be translated as the half-and-half arrangement. The *contadino* cultivates the land, and is bound to hand over to the owner of it half the produce. The function of the *fattore*—overlooking, probably, several farms and many "*contadini*,"

—is to superintend this arrangement, to see that the absentee landlord gets his due half, to receive his share of the produce, and to turn it into cash, preparatory to handing the proceeds to his employer. The farms are generally very small, and hired labour is employed to a very small extent. The ordinary practice is for the *contadino* to cultivate his farm, or “*podere*,” himself, with the help of his own family. So that a large family, provided that it is a healthy, active, and industrious one, is by no means a burden, but rather a source of prosperity to a *contadino*.

It follows that the social position of a *contadino* is a far superior one to that of a hired agricultural labourer. He has no master. There is no man to say to him, “Go?” and he must go; no man to call him to account for the disposition of his hours. He labours when and how he chooses, and rests when he chooses. If the cultivation of the land intrusted to him should be so unsatisfactory that the produce is found to fall off notably, and more than the difference of seasons can account for, the *contadino* may be removed, but only after giving due notice.

Of course, as may be supposed, the standing and position of the *contadini* differ very widely one from another, as the size and value of their farms differ, and as the men themselves differ. Generally the relationship between the landowner and the *contadino* is a pleasant and friendly one. And in many cases, especially in the rural districts more remote from the great cities, *contadini* families may frequently be met with which have tilled the same acres from time immemorial. They may have been on the land—probably have been on it as long as, perhaps longer, than the owners—three, four, or five hundred years. It would enter as little into the calculation of one of these men that he might be turned out of his ancestral homestead, as it would into the contemplation of the owner of the estate that he might suddenly be ousted from it. Some of these *contadini*, the sons of a long line of *contadini* forefathers, become rich. But it is

rarely that they think of changing their line of life for that reason ; for Italy is, on the whole, perhaps the most conservative country on the face of the globe. And the mere fact that a man's ancestors have for many generations lived in the same house, followed the same occupation, and loved the same fields, is generally felt by him as a very strong reason why he should continue to do the same.

Now Carlo Sparti was a *contadino* of the class here described. For generations past his family had been getting richer. And the result was that their dwelling had been improved ; that the store of house-plenishing—especially of superabundant linen—was increased ; that an additional *podere* had been obtained from the landlord ; that the daily fare of the family was improved ; that on Sundays and holidays the lads and lasses of the family were the smartest of the rustic beaux and belles in all the country-side ; and that there was no necessity for sending out the sons to seek their living in the world elsewhere. But it did not at all result from their prosperity that they ever dreamed of turning themselves into aught different from *contadini*. The men of the family went out to their daily labour—might be seen following the slow steps of their oxen, goad in hand, along the loamy furrows, or barefooted among the vines, pruning and binding up the young shoots in the spring, or purple-stained at the gathering of the vintage in the autumn, or sleeping in the shade during the hot hours of the summer day, after the midday meal of onion soup, bread, figs, and wine, every article in the simple composition of which grew on the fields they tilled.

In short, however well-to-do the Sparti were ; however respectable and respected from one end of the Casentino to the other ; however smart and spruce Carlo might look on *festa* days, or on flirting expeditions to Marrolo—the most festive days of all to him ; however handsome a young fellow Carlo himself might be, still he and his were *contadini*, and nothing but *contadini*. And it was impossible not to feel that

this damning fact made Giulia's rebellion against destiny and the Church all the wickeder.

It may be, perhaps, that if, on the occasion of that last interview between Carlo and Giulia at the stable door, the former had had the misfortune to come to speech with either the Signora Rappi or the Signorina Olivia, he would not have ventured to renew his offence so soon. But, as was seen, that trial was spared him. The jovial old *fattore* had bid him good-night in a very friendly manner; and—it came to pass that on the third evening from that day, at about eight o'clock, Carlo was not sitting at the Spàrti supper-table with the rest of the family, but *was* sitting on a low stone-wall in the immediate neighbourhood of the dam of Tito Vanni's mill—all alone, and doing nothing at all—not even singing.

The habits of life of Tuscan countryfolks are very much alike, be they *fattori* or be they *contadini*; and the same hour was the supper-time in the Rappi household as in that of the Spàrti. And in the former, as well as in the latter, there was one who seemed to want no supper that night.

"Where's Giulia? Call your sister, Olivia. She knows I expect her to be in her place at table when the soup is put down!" said the Signora Rappi, in a sharp and angry tone, as the family—all except the defaulter—stood around the table, about to take their places.

"Ah, *misericordia!* there are many things Giulia knows are expected of her, that people may expect a long time before she thinks of doing them," said Olivia, spitefully, as she moved slowly to the door on her errand to call the truant.

Presently she returned; and her handsome Madonna face had more of an expression of triumph than of trouble or alarm as she declared that Giulia was not in her chamber—was certainly not in the house, indeed! What was to happen next, she—Olivia—did not know; but thought, for her part, that it would be a good thing for all of them if something were done with Giulia before she had disgraced them all.



Then, and not till then, the *fattore* made his confession. But, though grievously afraid, he thought his best chance lay in carrying the war into the enemy's country.

"Disgrace, indeed!" he cried; "I say that our Giulia is a grace, and not a disgrace in the house, or in any man's house! And I don't want to have anything to say to anybody that says or thinks the contrary. I call it a disgrace for a sister to talk that way of her own father's daughter. What do you know about it? I told Giulia to step as far as Vanni's mill to give the miller a message about that wheat of Cecco Drassi's. For there's nobody can do an errand as well as she can. So that's where she is, if you want to know! She'll be here directly; and, wife, take care there's a bit of supper kept hot for her. Disgrace, indeed! A-looking after her poor old father's business for him!"

No doubt there was the affair of Cecco Drassi's wheat, and no doubt a message had to be sent to the miller. But it may be strongly suspected, I take it, that the *fattore* knew just as well as Giulia did whom she was likely to meet on her way to the mill.

The mother and daughter looked at each other significantly; and there was silence for a minute or two, while the soup plates were being filled. And then the Signora Rappi spoke,—

"You don't like to hear of disgrace, Rappi! It pricks your conscience, maybe! But I say there *is* disgrace in a little girl like Giulia being out stravaguing at this time of night! And it's not disgrace to her—it's disgrace to them that sent her! And she, too, intended for the holy calling she is! I am sure I am afraid to think what the Priore will say to it!"

"Who cares what he will say?" cried the *fattore*, in the first heat of his indignation. But the strength of the sentiment was more than he could venture to support. "And why should he say anything?" he continued, in a somewhat lower tone. "What is the use of telling the Priore anything

about it? Least said is soonest mended. The child will be here in a minute, I tell you."

"I wish I knew nothing of Giulia's goings-on," said Olivia, with a profound sigh; "for then it would not be my duty to say anything about her and her doings. But I suppose father cannot wish me to be guilty of sacrilege in the holy sacrament of confession."

And Olivia crossed herself, and dropped her long eyelashes over her fine eyes as she uttered the last terrible words in a low, awestruck tone of voice.

The poor *fattore* groaned, and pushed from before him his yet untasted plate of soup with an air of speechless misery.

"Of course, your father cannot mean that; and of course he knows that it is our bounden duty to conceal none of our thoughts in that holy sacrament, much less the sinful thoughts of anger and impatience which are caused in our minds by the sad spectacle of a father abetting his daughter in such conduct."

"I should be sorry, indeed, not to seek absolution for the feelings I am betrayed into day after day in this house," sighed Olivia.

Poor Rappi knew it all—all, and ever so much more—the tears that a minute or two more would bring forth respecting his own rapid progress toward perdition; and the danger that he would be driven into, in his agony, of uttering some terribly blasphemous denunciation of Church and churchmen, which would all be duly repeated to his ecclesiastical tyrant. So he sought safety in flight, as he had done many a time before; rose from the table with a groan, and, putting his hat on, even as his wife had complained to the priest that it was in his power to do, went out supperless, and strolled up the village in the direction of the mill.

Meanwhile little Giulia, knowing well that, despite the message she was intrusted with by her father, it would be well for all parties concerned that she should be absent as

short a time as might be from home, had sped lightly as a flitting ghost along the vineyard path, through the narrow, stone-wall-enclosed lane, over the stepping-stones that crossed the brook that turned the mill-wheel, and up the stony, stair-like bit of ascent that led to the mill. And there in the moonlight, on the low parapet wall beside the mill dam, she saw a figure of a man sitting—the sight of which neither caused her to jump nor scream, nor show any other symptom of surprise whatever. Nevertheless she said, with that profundity of craft which is known to characterize the female young of the human race,—“What, Carlo, is that you? Who would have thought of seeing you there at this time of night!”

“What a wonderful chance! It must be the blessing of the Madonna! If I was but sure of it, no quantity of wax-candles would be enough to pay her for it.”

“Father has sent me with a message to the miller. You are hardly likely to be there when I come back, I suppose. If you were, we might walk as far as the house together. I sha’n’t be a minute.”

“Try me for all night, and see whether I am here or not when you come back, that’s all! Ah, Giulietta mia! You don’t know how much I love you!”

“*A rivederci dunque!* I sha’n’t be a minute.”

Certainly the message to Maso Vanni, the miller, was given with no unnecessary prolixity; and Giulia came tripping back in almost as short a time as she had promised. And then, as they walked homeward arm-in-arm, as, being *engaged*, though not formally betrothed, they were perfectly justified in doing, the conversation between them very shortly took a more serious and less light-hearted tone.

“Father is always as kind and as good as possible. He gave me the message to the miller on purpose to give us the chance, you know. Dear father! But I sometimes think that there is no hope. The life at home gets worse and worse every day. It is very difficult to bear. And—if

something does not happen before long to prevent it—I am sure, mother, and Olivia, and that horrid old Priore, between them, will get their will, and make me go into a convent,” said the poor child, almost sobbing.

“I’d burn down the convent myself, rather! But, Giulia mia! why should we make so many words about it? There’s my hand! Will you accept it? I think your father would give you to me, though I am not his equal in station.”

“It is not that, Carlo mio! I am sure father has that opinion of you that he would gladly have you for a son-in-law. But it is all very easy to say that father would give me to you. You don’t know what it is at home. What with mother, and what with the Priore, father can’t say his soul is his own—hardly. And I am quite sure that we shall never make it out to be married here at Marrolo. Quite sure. What! you and me married by the Priore! He would excommunicate us for speaking of such a thing!”

“Let him excommunicate as much as he likes, I should say. Any way, they can’t put you into a convent without your own consent, my heart’s treasure. And you would never speak that word.”

“I don’t know! I sometimes think that it would be the best thing to do. I should get rid of the life I lead at home, any way. And it would be better for father. And—and—I should not much care, if they took you away from me.”

The last words were spoken in a lower tone, and were accompanied by a half-sob, and a little nestling movement up to Carlo’s side, as they walked.

“*Anima mia!* my own sweet Giulietta! That shall never, never be; not for all the priests in Christendom. But we cannot go on in this way. Something must be done. Ecco! The fattore will be at Stia to-morrow for market-day, and I will see him there. I will talk to him when there is nobody to spy and interrupt us. See now, *anima mia*, if we do not settle something. I suppose you must not take another turn before going into the house?” said Carlo, longingly.

"Not for the world! I shall catch it bad enough, as it is. You must run away now, before they hear your voice from the window. Don't come any nearer!"

"Good-night, then, my own best and dearest! Keep up your courage! Do not despair! God bless you a thousand times, my Giulietta! I love you with all my heart and soul!"

"Thanks, Carlo! That is the best comfort. Good-night! I must run in. God bless you!"

And so the lovers parted.

It turned out to be unnecessary for Carlo to go to Stia on the following day, as he had promised Giulia; for he had not gone far toward his home, after leaving her, before he fell in with the *fattore* moodily lounging in a very disconsolate fashion, with his hands behind his back, and his eyes fixed on the ground.

"Did you see my girl at the mill?" asked the *fattore*, after he and the young *contadino* had exchanged salutations.

"Yes, Signor Rappi, I saw her and walked home with her. I left her at your door a minute ago. And— I had made up my mind to speak to you. If I had not met you now, I should have gone to Stia to have a talk with you to-morrow. I told the Signorina Giulia that I would do so."

"Well! there's naught to hinder you from speaking! Speak as much as you please, if that will do any good. For my part, I don't see that talking is much likely to mend matters. Things are in a bad way with us at home, friend Carlo. And to tell it you all in one word—hearken in your ear!"—here he lowered his voice to a whisper, and advanced his face to within an inch of his companion's ear—"it's all along of that damned, cursed, hypocritical old brute of a priest up there! May the devil fly away with him and all his fellows!"

"The devil never did so good a job! But what I wanted to speak to you about is soon said," replied Carlo, continuing his speech with a little hesitation. "I know very well, Signor Rappi, that I am but a *contadino*, and you are a *fattore*, and

there's a wide difference between us. But things are pretty comfortable with us at home; and—in short, if you will give me your daughter Giulia for my wife, I'll strive to make her happy, and be a good husband to her. She shall never want for anything, and shall live as she has been used to live; and—and I think she would be happier than she is at home. So you have only to say the word, and there is my hand on it."

"Ah! happier than she is at home, poor child! she might easily be that! And so might some more of us! And I wish with all my heart, friend Carlo, that I could live to see Giulia your wife. So, that's plain enough. But, Lord bless you! it's little you know about it. Suppose I was to go home and say that you were going to marry Giulia out of hand, and I was to give notice to the Priore that the banns were to be published in church. Do you think it would come to pass? Do you suppose we could carry it through? It makes a cold sweat come over me to think of it. Why, the house would not hold us at home. It can't be done. It's not to be thought of."

"But I have thought of it a good bit," returned Carlo, rather encouraged than otherwise by what the *fattore* had said: "and I'll tell you, Signor Rappi, what I have been thinking, if you will excuse me for making so bold."

"Tell away, lad! I'll be only too glad if you see any way out of the wood; for I'm sure *I* don't," said the old man.

"Well, this is what I thought. You have a sister living at Florence. Let la Signorina Giulia go to visit her aunt. And let us be married at Florence without saying a word about it till it is done, and can't be undone by all the Priores in the land."

"*Per Bacco! ah!*" (with a long-drawn note of emphasis on the last syllable); "what a piece of work there would be when the truth came out! I do think she would set the Casentino on fire from one end to the other!"

"What, Giulia?" said Carlo, aghast.

"No; her mother," said the *fattore*, with a look of grim humour, and a twinkle in his eye: "Giulia is not come to that time of life yet."

"Nor ever will! She has seen too much of the priests," said Carlo.

"Well, your plan is not a bad one. It can hardly be worse for me at home than it is now, when all's said and done. And the Priore will know that what's done can't be undone. And, as it happens, my sister is one of the regular priests' sort—hand and glove with them. If it wasn't for that, we'd never get leave for Giulia to go to her. As it is, perhaps we may. And then, when she has been there the necessary time, I could come up to Florence, and we could get the knot tied without her aunt knowing anything about it till the job is done."

"Bravo, Signor Rappi! Capital! *Non mi par vero!* It does not seem true to me!" said Carlo, using the phrase the Tuscans have constantly in their mouths to signify that anything is beyond their utmost hopes—that it is, as we say, too good to be true.

"Well, I'll think of it; and talk to Giulia about it—when I can get an opportunity, which is not every day. And now I suppose I must be going home. Pray God Signora Olivia may be asleep. But there's not much hope of that," sighed the poor *fattore*.

"Good-night, Signor Rappi! I suppose I shall be hearing from you?" said Carlo, lingeringly.

"Yes; as soon as I have anything to say. And meantime you had better keep away from the place. I'll tell Giulia I told you so. Good-night!"

And so the two conspirators parted.

## CHAPTER VI.

FATTORE RAPPI had found an opportunity in the course of the following day to communicate to his younger daughter the result of his conversation with Carlo Sparti—to the infinite comfort and rejoicing of Giulia, as may be supposed. So much so that her experienced and cautious father, who had learned by the observation of long years that any manifestation of unusual gladness or light-heartedness was especially calculated to produce a corresponding increase of gloom and ill-temper in the two other female members of his family, hinted to her that she would do well to suppress any signs of happiness on the occasion.

The next thing to be done was to open to the Signora Olivia the scheme for sending Giulia on a visit to her aunt in Florence. This aunt, a sister of the *fattore*, was the childless wife of a rich wax-chandler in Florence, Domenico Manforti by name, and, as has been mentioned, she was quite as much a devotee as her sister-in-law, Signora Rappi. It was quite in keeping with her husband's business that she should be so. Readers belonging to the outside world of heretics may not understand, perhaps, why a wax-chandler or a wax-chandler's wife should be more likely to be close friends of the priests and of the "black party," as the phrase goes in Italy, than any other person. This only shows their ignorance of the practices of Roman Catholic devotion. There is nothing which the Madonna and all the Saints like so much as wax-candles. A vow to any one of these heavenly personages generally takes the form of a present of so many wax-candles. In the decking out of the churches and altars for occasions of high ceremonial, wax-candles always play the most conspicuous part. And thus it comes to pass that there is a strong connexion and bond of union between the priests and the wax-chandlers. Religion and devout practices and beliefs are exceedingly necessary to the wax-chandler's



trade. The true basis of friendship, as the old Roman historian tells us, is to have the same likings and the same dislikes. And thus it comes to pass that in Roman Catholic countries the priests and the wax-chandlers are apt to be fast friends.

The wax-chandler's house at Florence was overrun by priests, as completely as a rotten ship is by rats—all the more so from the fact that Signor Domenico Manforti and his wife were childless. The Signora Manforti was a woman after her sister-in-law's own heart—and therefore the fattore's proposal that Giulia should be sent to spend some time with her aunt was received with more favour by his lady-wife than his suggestions often were. Signor Rappi, moreover, rendered sly by long oppression and snubbing, had baited the trap very cunningly. He, for his part, would have been well content to see Giulia married to their neighbour, Carlo Sparti; but since that was not to be, it really was cruel to the poor child to leave her where she was constantly exposed to receive his addresses. If the thing was to be broken off, and given up for good and all, by far the best way would be to send her out of the way for awhile—with more to the like effect.

Of course the arrangement was not definitely agreed to till the Signora Olivia had had an opportunity of consulting her director and conscience-keeper. But the Priore was found to be favourable to the project. He knew Signor Domenico Manforti, and, still more, his wife, perfectly well—knew all the priests who were in the habit of frequenting their house; knew which of them had the exclusive direction of the Signora Manforti's conscience and conduct; and upon the whole judged that Giulia's stay in such a house, separated altogether from her lover, hearing nothing from him (for that would be provided for by the arrest which the Priore had reason to know was likely to fall on the young man shortly)—hearing, on the contrary, all that was bad of him—and assiduously worked upon by all around her, in

accordance with instructions which he himself would communicate to his friend Signora Manforti's confessor, would be more adapted than anything to forward his and her mother's views respecting her.

So it was duly settled that in a few days—as soon as the *fattore* could make it convenient to accompany her on the journey—Giulia should go on a visit to the wax-chandler and his wife.

Giulia, in the meantime, during the few intervening days before her departure for the capital, found some little difficulty in keeping her own—and her father's—counsel. Of course it would not do to allow any sign of pleasure or rejoicing in the projected arrangements to be visible. A dull, passive acquiescence was the tone of manner which she strove to assume. But her sister Olivia was not disposed to allow so fine an occasion to remain without “improvement,” or to accept her sister's mere passive resignation as affording a sufficient triumph to the victory of religious principle in the household. This was the sort of “improvement” Giulia had to listen to pretty nearly every hour of the day, during the days that intervened before her departure.

It would be: “Ah, Giulia! I shall never cease to pray for you. *That* you may depend on. But it is a dreadful disgrace to have a sister sent away from her home for such causes. And mother feels it, I can tell you, a great deal more than she is willing to show.” Or, at another time: “No doubt it is for the best. They are very godly people that you are going to, and there will be no chance of your going on there as you have here. No slipping out of nights there—nothing of the kind. No possibility of ever seeing a human soul except such as aunt chooses to have at her house, and then under her own eyes. No going out of the house from week's end to week's end, except to mass, and then with aunt at your side. If anything *can* reclaim you, and save you, Giulia, it will be such a life as you will lead with aunt Manforti. But it is a terrible disgrace to the family—

such a thing never happened to any one of the Rappi before, as the Priore was saying to mother the other day. And you must admit—even *you* will hardly deny—that you would never have come to this if you had been willing to be guided by me.”

All this, and much more in a similar strain, poor little Giulia had to bear during those days, and almost at every hour of them. The *fattore*’s usual troubles were somewhat mitigated during the same period. La Signora Rappi deemed that the step which had been decided upon was, if not quite a decisive one, yet very nearly such, as to the ultimate winning of the game which had been played between herself and Don Ignazio on the one side, and her husband on the other, for so long a time, respecting Giulia’s future destiny. She had won an important move; and, at all events, till that should be finally settled and scored on her side, she was willing to allow the unhappy *fattore* some respite. Giulia and her father, of course, kept their own counsel; not venturing, however, to say a word upon the subject even to each other. Of Carlo nothing more was seen at or near the Rappi homestead during those days. And this circumstance, desirable as it was in the Signora Olivia’s eyes, might perhaps have awakened some suspicion in her mind, had it not been that she attributed Carlo’s continued absence to the cause which Don Ignazio had told her of, as about to remove young Sparti from the neighbourhood. The Priore had said nothing more to her on this subject, and she had not ventured to ask him.

And thus the days passed, till the evening preceding that on which the *fattore* and Giulia were to start in the *fattore*’s *bagherino* for Florence. Despite the nature of the captivity to which she was about to be consigned, and which she would have to endure in solitary misery until the expected day of her delivery should arrive, Giulia was looking forward to the morrow’s journey with such high spirits that some suspicion that all was not going quite as it seemed might well have

been awakened in the minds of the Signora Rappi and her elder daughter. They attributed any symptoms of this sort, however, to the silly and childish pleasure with which Giulia looked forward to one day's emancipation from the toils, troubles, and vexations of her home, and comforted themselves with the thought of the amount of salutary discipline which awaited her at her journey's end. But Giulia's light-heartedness was destined to be very effectually dispelled, and her journey rendered as sad a one as the most ascetic lover of "discipline" could have desired, by an incident which occurred on that last evening.

Just as the Rappi family were sitting down to dinner, the sound of a horse's feet was heard at the door, and in the next minute Signor Simone Bossi entered the room, and accepted the pressing invitations of the Signora Olivia to sup with them.

The reception of Signor Bossi, the wealthy landowner, and good and faithful son of the Church, and the protégé of the priests, was, of course, a very different one from that of the reprobate *liberalone contadino*, poor Carlo Sparti. Of course his visits and attentions, the object of which was perfectly understood and recognized, were very flattering to Olivia. And of course she considered herself a fortunate girl to have gained the affections—or, rather, the hand, for it was a business-like matter—of a suitor every way so desirable and unexceptionable. Of course Olivia was ready to become his wife, purposing to make him a very good one, and was proud of the prospect. And most assuredly she would have scouted the idea of accepting the hand of such a one as Carlo Sparti, if it had been offered to her. Yet, strange to say, she never once had tasted the *same sort* of delight at any portion of her extremely eligible lover's love-making as she would have felt from any manifestation of admiration stolen from her sister's much-abused lover, if ever she could have managed to steal any such. In truth, it must be admitted that the love-making between Olivia and Signor Simone was a very business-like

and rather cold and matter-of-fact sort of affair. As for the *fattoressa*, she was toward Simone all that the most devoted mother-in-law could be to a wealthy and very proper expected son-in-law. And of course the *fattore* had nothing to say against Signor Simone Bossi. He did not like him personally: he was not a man of his sort. But it was impossible to deny that he was "a very good match"—that in marrying him his daughter would be making a social step in advance of her own position, just as Giulia, if she married Carlo Sparti, would be undeniably making a social step, though not so large a one, in the other direction. The *fattore*, therefore, on this as on all other occasions, received Signor Simone with all becoming courtesy and civility. The only one of the party to whom the presence of Simone was positively disagreeable was Giulia. She could not endure him—partly because she had a kind of magnetic consciousness of his admiration, which was exceedingly distasteful to her; partly because the slightest manifestation of this feeling was sure to be visited with cruel retribution on her afterward; and partly, perhaps most of all, because she knew that Simone and Carlo exceedingly disliked each other.

After the presentation of a nosegay of early flowers, which Simone had brought carefully wrapped in paper for his love, together with a proper quantum of the gallant speeches prescribed for usage on such occasions, the guest was duly got into his place at table between Olivia the mother and Olivia the daughter—an attempt on his part to seat himself on the other side of his appointed mistress, so as to be between her and Giulia, having been skilfully defeated by the united efforts of all the three women—and the supper began.

No sooner was the soup finished, than Simone, addressing the *fattore*, asked him if he had heard what had happened an hour or two ago over at Sparti's farm? A very ugly business, he was told, it was likely to be.

Giulia turned deadly pale, and felt that Olivia's eye was fixed on her.

No; they had heard nothing. What was it?

"Oh (with a sneer), only the carabinieri—four men and a brigadier—had come to the farm, and Master Carlo was arrested and marched off to prison—to Florence, even, as he, Bossi, had heard."

Olivia and her mother exchanged glances furtively.

"Carlo Sparti arrested!" cried the fattore; "what about, in God's name?"

"Accused of hiding and favouring the escape of a deserter from the conscription. Don't you remember, Signor Rappi, the affair of that poor fellow, Paolo Torre? Well, it seems the government have never been able to find him. And they don't think he has left the country. And it seems pretty clear—so I'm told—that Sparti had a main hand in helping him off. Likely to be a bad job for Sparti. It'll be the ruin of that family."

"I don't believe a word of it!" cried Rappi, stoutly.

"Why, all the village knows it, Signor Rappi, by this time. There were ever so many saw the carabinieri take him. You may depend upon it, there's no doubt at all about the matter."

"I mean that I don't believe Sparti ever had any hand in hiding away that fellow from the conscription. And you may be sure they'll soon find out that he had nothing to do with it. I'm off to Florence to-morrow morning, and I daresay I shall be able to find out something more about it."

"You starting for Florence, Signor Rappi! That is something new, ain't it?" asked the visitor.

"Yes. Giulia here is going to pay a visit to my sister, Signora Manforti, the wax-chandler's wife, in the Mercato Nuovo; and I'm going to take her in the bagherino."

"That's a pleasanter hearing for Miss Giulia than it is for us, who are left behind in the Casentino. Among all the gay Florence folks, you'll have forgotten all your old friends before you come back again, Signorina Giulia," said the gallant Simone.

"It's very little Giulia will have to do with any of the gay people—or any people at all—at Florence, Signor Simone. My sister-in-law, Assunta Manforti, is a pious woman, and has no acquaintance with worldly people. If it was to any other sort of person, or any other sort of house, you might suppose I should not send my child away from this roof. It is to be hoped she will come back prepared for the holy vocation she is intended for," said the Signora Rappi, speaking *to* her guest, but *at* her daughter.

"And I don't suppose it much matters whether she forgets anybody out of her own house, or whether she remembers them," added Olivia, with a toss of the head and a sneer.

Simone Bossi perceived that he was—to use a vulgar but expressive phrase—putting his foot in it; and hastened to take refuge in some remark to the *fattore* about his having a fine day for his journey to-morrow.

"And if you will take my advice, Rappi," put in his wife, "you will neither meddle nor make in that matter of young Sparti. If he is innocent, they will find it out without your help. And if he did have a hand in screening a *refrattario*, it's not very creditable for you to be showing any interest in him."

"You never said a wiser word in your life, Signora!" said Bossi, anxious both to prevent any friendship between Carlo and the *fattore*, and to atone for the little blunder he had made before; "and as for the fellow being innocent, you may take my word for it he knows where Paolo Torre is at this moment. Why, they were old and close friends, he and Torre. Oh! they know what they are about, the *carabinieri* do, you may depend!"

It may be easily guessed what Giulia's feelings were during this conversation, and how kindly she felt towards Signor Simone, and what sort of reception she accorded to him when once again, before taking himself off, he attempted to say some complimentary word in her ear with reference to her journey on the following day. At length he was gone; and

Giulia, after having to endure, in the shape of a series of grimly expressed hopes that she might return from the discipline she was going to a discreeter and more chastened girl, the expression of her Madonna-like sister's ill-temper, which had been excited by the fickle Simone's ill-judged compliments, at length escaped to her room, to cry in peace over all the recollections that her last night in her native home brought with it.

## CHAPTER VII.

It was true enough in those days—that is to say, the days shortly after the Italian government had driven the Papal troops out of the once Pontifical State and annexed the country to “Italy”—that the offence of harbouring a deserter from the conscription, or favouring the escape or concealment of one, was likely to be a bad business for the person convicted of having been guilty of either of those offences. So far Signor Simone Bossi had said no more than the truth, though no doubt his motive for saying it, when he did, was an abominably spiteful one.

The young Italian government had been very much and seriously troubled by the extreme unwillingness of the population which had recently passed under its rule from that of the Pope to submit to the conscription. And the matter was made much worse and more serious by the active and never-ceasing efforts of the priests and their party to intensify the dislike of the peasants for the new civic duty imposed upon them, to induce those who had drawn bad numbers to abscond, and to give them assistance in hiding themselves, and, in many instances, getting away out of the country. Generally speaking, those guilty of such practices were always the priests and the partisans of the former government, who were their friends and under their influence. And it was, therefore, on the first face of the thing, impossible



that Carlo Sparti, a known liberal, should have had any hand in the escape of this Paolo Torre. But of course it was possible enough that private friendship might be the inducement, rather than political feeling, in any given case. And, unluckily, it was true enough that Carlo had been known to be, in some sort, the friend of the missing man.

It is true, too, that the Casentino district was never at any time any part of the dominions of the Pope. It was and had always been a portion of Tuscany. But it is situated close to the frontier of what had been the Papal territory, and such epidemics as a popular determination to resist an obnoxious law are very contagious. And symptoms that this trouble was beginning to spread from one province to the other were calculated to make the government all the more severe in their determination to reform them.

The accusation under which Carlo Sparti laboured, and which had caused his arrest, was, as Simone Bossi had so spitefully said, a serious matter. And it will be readily understood that the subject in all its bearings formed the topic of conversation between the *fattore* and Giulia as they sat side by side in the *bagherino*, on the following morning, on their way to Florence.

If the reader has never been in Tuscany, he can hardly be expected to know what a *bagherino* is. It is a kind of very light gig, consisting of little else than wheels, axle, shafts, and a very simple and light frame behind the shafts, which supports the seat slung between the wheels and over the axle. The bottom of the vehicle—or, rather, the place where the bottom should be—is occupied by nothing more solid than a net-work of ropes, on which a mat of rushes may be placed. The seat is usually wide—wide enough to enable the sitter to sit well back and at his ease, but it has no back to it. It might be sat upon by a person facing the direction *from* which the carriage is proceeding as well as by one facing the horse. And in case of need an extra passenger may be accommodated in this manner. It will be seen that lightness is the

main characteristic of the little vehicle, and drawn, as is usually the case, by one of the active, hardy little ponies, which, bred in the maremma, are common in all parts of Tuscany, to the music of the little peal of bells he carries with him, the bagherino often accomplishes its eight or ten miles in the hour.

Signor Rappi's bagherino was a very smart one, as became a man of his position and substance. The pony was a perfect representative of his class; the harness was profusely adorned with brass ornaments, burnished till they shone like gold; a fox's tail hung from the frontlet over the pony's nose; and the bells, which were fixed to the high peak of the extremely small saddle, were of silver, and jingled melodiously to his short rapid little trot.

The pair who sat behind the pony might have been deemed a perfect picture of the most characteristic sitters in a carriage which is specially the vehicle of rural Tuscany—a *fattore*, who was the very picture of a *fattore*, and a *fattore's* daughter, such as could not have been matched in the Casentino. Signor Rappi, his broad chest resplendent in a scarlet waistcoat with silver buttons, occupied fully two-thirds of the seat. His very low-crowned, very broad-brimmed white felt hat seemed especially calculated to set off in picturesque fashion his broad, red, jolly-looking face. A bright blue coat with huge metal buttons, a still brighter blue and voluminous handkerchief about his thick neck, and a pair of drab breeches, with continuations of gaiters of the same material, showing a pair of legs that a chairman might be proud of, completed his costume. Giulia was wrapped in a comfortable grey cloak—for the October mornings were beginning to be fresh, and the travellers had a high, bleak region to pass—the hood of which supplied the place of any other covering for the head, and framed as bright and lovable a dimpled, laughter-sparkling face as ever hood had under it; for Giulia was looking more like herself, as she sat by her father's side in the bagherino, than she had done for

many a day. It was quite wonderful how the fattore's spirits rose as the good little pony placed mile after mile between him and—all the disagreeables of his home; and the contagion of his cheerfulness affected Giulia. It was a long time, too, since she had known what it was to be at perfect peace and a safe distance from continually preaching, chiding, reproaching, evil-predicting tongues, and the effect was such as to make peace seem almost like perfect happiness. Then the fresh air of the bright October morning was cheering, the brisk motion was cheering, the jingle of the pony's bells was cheering. And who that remembers Rousseau's exultation over his "*voyage à faire et Paris au bout*," can doubt that this first excursion beyond the limits of her native Casentino, with Florence at the end of it, must have had a charm for the eighteen-year-old fattore's daughter, which must have made life seem bright and full of good promise to her, despite all the threatenings of trouble with which the prospect was checkered.

As for the threats that had been so reiteratedly held out to her respecting the dreadful dulness and "discipline" of the life she was to lead in the house of her aunt, they did not avail at all to kill the joy of the passing hour. Was not all that to end when Carlo should come and carry her off to be his bride? And what would she not cheerfully endure for a time, if the time were to be followed by such a consummation? La Signora Manforti might shut her up as close as she pleased, and deliver her over to be preached at by all the priests in Florence, if only she had that ending of it all to look forward to. But, then, was that ending sure and certain? This terrible news of Carlo's arrest was a very black overhanging cloud, which sadly marred the sunshine of the bright October morning. Nevertheless, her father's talk upon the subject was very reassuring and consoling. He felt perfectly convinced that Carlo was entirely innocent of any complicity in the deserter's escape; that his accusation and arrest had been occasioned only by some blunder, which

would assuredly soon be discovered and put right, and that all would ultimately be well. And Giulia had a very high opinion of her father's judgment and knowledge of all things. She suffered herself to be persuaded, and to give herself up to the delight of unwonted freedom and all the new pleasure of her journey.

The few miles which separate Marrolo from the upper extremity of the valley of the Casentino were soon passed over ; and then began the long and toilsome ascent of the high range which divides the Casentino from the Florentine Val d'Arno. Slowly and laboriously the willing little pony dragged his fat master and young mistress up the steep but well-made road. To the north of the Alps any man would have left the carriage to walk up the hill and ease the willing little beast. But that would have been a most un-Italian proceeding. An Italian—even in the coldest weather—never walks when he can be carried. And Signor Domenico and Giulia kept their seats with untiring patience till they at length reached the solitary inn at the top of the pass, called "La Consuma." There they were to halt for the midday rest and food. Signor Domenico was well known there. But Giulia was a stranger, and had to make acquaintance with the landlady and her daughters, who of course looked upon Giulia's visit to Florence to see her aunt as one of the most enviable and delightful occurrences that could happen to a girl—perhaps upon the whole *the most* enviable piece of good fortune that could fall to the lot of any girl.

Then, after dinner, there was the long descent to be made into the Florentine Val d'Arno, coming down upon the little town of Pont' à Sieve in the latter district. And the pony had to take all care and conduct himself very discreetly on the descent ; for the *fattore*, very soon after leaving the inn, yielded to his usual "custom of an afternoon," and went fast asleep. So that little Giulia was left to her own uninterrupted meditations on the immediate future that lay before her.

And as she approached Florence and the end of her journey, it must be owned that certain darker tints of mis-giving and apprehension overshadowed to a certain degree the light-heartedness with which she had begun the journey in the bright and bracing morning. It was not that she had any very serious doubts as to Carlo obtaining his freedom, and coming, with her father's help, to claim her, and—in short, of all ending well and happily. But, in the mean time, that which was more immediately before her did not paint itself to her imagination in attractive colours. Partly it was mere shyness that afflicted her. She had never seen this aunt of her, nor her husband, Signor Manforti. Then they were Florentine people, known to be very fine, apt to give themselves great airs, accustomed to wonderful refinements of luxury—not kindly, simple, plain, unpretending folks, like the country people of the Casentino. Exceedingly wicked, too, the Florentines were well known to be by Giulia and all the inhabitants of the Casentino; and so crafty that they were able to steal a man's shirt from off his back without his knowing it. But this, of course, did not apply to her own uncle and aunt; and the consideration of such facts almost reconciled Giulia to the extreme seclusion which she had been so often told awaited her in the house of the wax-chandler and his wife.

Then Pont' à Sieve was passed; and the twelve miles of road which had still to be traversed before the capital was reached were all on level ground. But the increased number of vehicles of all sorts which they encountered on the road made it absolutely necessary for the fattore to wake himself up and attend to his driving. The Ave Maria bells were ringing just as they reached the city and entered it by the Porta Croce; so that Giulia had still light enough left her to see all that her eyes were so eager to see, as they drove through the city to the house of Signor Manforti in the Mercato Nuovo.

Giulia's first impression was that all was infinitely less

grand—poorer, dirtier, and more sordid—than she had anticipated. The Santa Croce quarter of the city is not a favourable specimen of the City of Flowers. But when they reached the Piazza dello Signoria, which they had to drive through, Giulia was equally disposed to think that the glories of Florence far excelled all that she could ever have conceived.

A very few minutes more brought them to their journey's end in the Mercato Nuovo; and Giulia, before she had recovered from the astonishment into which the sight of the Palazzo Vecchio, and its statues, and the great fountain, and the Loggia had thrown her, and before she had had time to duly consider the manner in which it would behove her to accost her aunt, found herself in that lady's presence, in the comfortably furnished but gloomy apartment above the *cereria*.\*

After brief salutation, the *fattore* hurried back to the street to see to the stabling of his little nag, and the putting up of his *bagherino*; and Giulia, after a hasty presentation, was left with her aunt. Signor Manforti had not yet come in from his shop.

"You are welcome to this house, my niece; and may the Holy Mother of God and the Saints grant that your stay here may be profitable to your soul's welfare!" said Signora Manforti, as she advanced toward Giulia, and, placing one hand on each of her shoulders, gave her a cold kiss, performed much after the fashion in which the assembled ecclesiastics in a cathedral or monastic choir pass round the kiss of peace, as it is called.

"Thanks, aunt! It is very kind of you and of my uncle to receive me," said Giulia, looking up with some trepidation at the tall, thin, and dry figure, clothed from the neck to the feet in a long, narrow, black robe of some unshining material.

"We are people, my niece, who, with the help of God and

\* A wax-chandler's shop.

His Holy Church, always endeavour to do our duty—and we shall strive to do it by you. It seems to me that you have not observed the holy image of the Blessed Virgin on the wall opposite to you.”

It was true that there was a little picture on the wall indicated, so smoke-begrimed as to give small indication of the subject represented, had it not been that the large circular gilt “glory” around the head of the pictured Virgin made the nature of the picture sufficiently evident to all Catholic eyes. But, if this had not been sufficient, the attention of every properly educated person entering the room was unmistakably called to the painting and to his duty as regarded it by a little oil lamp, which was always kept burning, and which hung from an iron bracket fixed in the wall, immediately in front of the picture.

It was true, also, that Giulia, her mind being very full of other thoughts, had not observed the holy image. Recalled, however, to her duty in this respect by her grim aunt’s slowly and austere enunciation, she coloured highly, and dropping a little courtesy opposite to the wall on which the fetish hung, crossed herself in due form.

“I grieve to find, my niece, from the letters of my sister-in-law, who is a devout woman, that your conduct and disposition have not hitherto been such as your best and truest friends could wish them. Let us hope that your levity and backslidings have been mainly caused by the too great freedom of a country home. Here you will have no such temptations to turn your thoughts from the meditations which ought wholly to employ them. That excellent and holy man, the Priore of Marrolo, has also written to a very good and devout priest, my own confessor and director, about you. The Priore takes a strong interest in your spiritual welfare ; and he, too, has not found that disposition in you which is so necessary to a young person destined to the holy vocation to which you are called. It will be our earnest endeavour here to correct that. And you may depend on it

that you will neither see nor hear here any person or any thing of a nature likely to divert your mind from the holy path before you."

Directly afterwards, the wax-chandler entered the room, and saluted and welcomed his niece in much the same terms as his better half—who was very conspicuously such. He was a roundabout little man, very autocratic in his shop, and very meek out of it. All the conversation between him and his wife during the supper-time, which shortly ensued, was of wax and wickedness—their own wax and the wickedness of their friends and neighbours. With regard to the wax, the wife said ditto to all her husband said; and with regard to the wickedness, the husband said ditto to all his wife said.

Giulia was surprised that her father did not return. The wax-chandler and his wife were not surprised. They knew the habits of the *fattore* on the occasions of his visits to Florence, and were quite aware that supper in some other haunts than their sombre little room, with its grim Madonna on the wall, and talk to match, was more to his taste than their society. No doubt he would come back in time to say good-night, with some excuse of business having prevented him from returning to sup with them.

When he did come, he with some difficulty contrived to have a few private words of leave-taking with his daughter.

"I know 'tis like shutting you into a dark cage, my little birdie. 'Tis worse than the *Murate*.\* But it won't last long. It sha'n't last long, my pet. Our friend Carlo will be all right—never doubt it. And then I am there. It won't be long before you hear of me—and of a certain other person too! Good-bye, darling! I shall be off by sunrise to-morrow morning."

And so poor little Giulia was left in the gloomy home, which was to be as a sort of vestibule of a nunnery to her.

\* The Florentine "Tombs." Formerly a convent; so named from the nuns having been walled up in it.



## CHAPTER VIII.

THE *fattore*, when he parted from Giulia at her aunt's house, intended, as he said, to start on his return to the Casentino at sunrise on the following morning. But it so happened that while indulging himself at his inn, before going to bed, with a spell of that gossiping so dear to all Tuscans, he chanced to hear something that induced him to postpone his departure for a few hours. There was a certain good-for-nothing sort of scamp who, among his varied attempts to persuade the world to find him in bread and cheese, had a year or two previously, for a short space, kept a little inn in the small town of Poppi in the Casentino. And in his capacity of inn-keeper at that place, Gino Sartori (for that was his name) had contrived to obtain credit for certain supplies of hay and oats at one of the farms in the management of *fattore* Rappi. Of course his inn soon went to the bad; and one fine night Gino added another moonlight flitting to the list of his previous removals of a similar kind, and left his Casentino creditors to whistle for their money. No doubt the man might have been traced and pursued. But Rappi wisely judged that it would have been throwing good money after bad to do so; and from that time to this he had never heard anything more of his friend Gino Sartori.

Now it so chanced that, while chatting with the people in the supper-room at his inn, some of whom he knew, and some of whom he had never seen before, the *fattore* learned that his old debtor was now keeping a jeweller's shop on the Ponte Vecchio, and was supposed to be doing pretty well. Every one who has ever been at Florence must have a vivid remembrance of the little shops which turn the old bridge over the Arno into a street. The Ponte Vecchio at Florence presents the only remaining instance of a bridge thus turned into a street—an arrangement which was once very common

in the ancient cities of Europe, and which, if it had nothing else to recommend it, was remarkable for the picturesque effect produced. This, as the traveller will remember, is eminently the case at Florence. The queer little houses on the bridge are very small, and they are all in the occupation of jewellers or goldsmiths.

Now to be the owner of a jeweller's shop would seem, at the first blush of the thing, to be a strangely notable promotion for such a scamp as the bankrupt inn-keeper of the Casentino. But there are jewellers and jewellers. Some of the shop-windows on the Ponte Vecchio are brilliantly enough furnished to make it difficult for lady visitors to pass the bridge without stopping to look at them. There are others which present a frontage shabby enough, not to say gloomy and dubious-looking. The show of goods in the windows of these latter is of that peculiar sort which suggests the idea that they do not represent the real business transacted in the tenement they so doubtfully adorn. In the case in question, there may be seen one or two dim and dubious-looking articles of would-be silver altar furniture ; a few spoons and forks of the same questionable appearance ; and perhaps an antique enamelled candlestick, or two or three dim old miniatures or snuff-boxes, to indicate that the owner of the establishment is a dealer in antiquities and curiosities. In some instances it is probable that such an external appearance may cover a more or less legitimate money-lending business, by means of which a small capital may be made very quickly to grow into a large one. In other instances, the same outward signs and tokens may not unfairly be permitted to lead to the conclusion that the trade carried on there is really, to a certain extent, that of a dealer in antiquities, strongly flavoured with a more or less decided cross with a receiver of stolen goods.

Now the dingy-looking little shop, at present, as Rappi learned, in the occupation of his debtor, Gino Sartori, presented just such an appearance as has been described ; and

certainly Sartori had never possessed any capital to have commenced money-lender even on the smallest scale.

Be his business, however, in the doubtful-looking little shop what it might, Rappi was determined not to leave Florence without at least an attempt to see him, and bring him to book in the matter of that old debt. On the following morning, therefore, as soon as there was any hope of finding the shops open, the *fattore* betook himself to the Ponte Vecchio, and there very soon discovered the name he was looking for over the shabbiest-looking little shop-front of all the row.

. Rappi entered, and asked a dirty, unwholesome-looking lad, who was pretending to sweep the place, if Signor Sartori was in. The boy said he would see, and vanished up a stair so narrow as barely to give passage to a man's body, constructed in the thickness of the wall which separated the front shop, opening on to the bridge, from a still smaller back shop looking on to the river. These two very small rooms on the ground-floor, and two equally small on the first-floor, reached by the stairs in question, formed the entirety of the dwelling.

In a minute or two the messenger returned, and said that if the visitor would sit down in the back shop, into which he ushered the *fattore* as he spoke, Signor Sartori would come down to him in a minute or two. A minute or two, in Tuscany, never, under the most favourable circumstances, means less than half-an-hour; but no genuine Tuscan complains of that, and Signor Rappi sat down to wait patiently. For a while he amused himself by looking out of the one little window on to the river, which he could see all the way to the Ponte Trinità, and beyond that again to the Ponte alla Carraja, with the woods of the Cascine behind it, and the far Apennine behind Pistoia, already white with the first snows of autumn, in the distance.

But the *fattore* was not much given to delight in landscape scenery, and after a little while, being tired of his occupa-

tion, he began to turn his attention to the contents of the little room he was in.

Now the fact was that Signor Gino Sartori, in the upstairs room over the front shop, had perfectly well heard and recognised the sonorous and un-Florentine-like voice of the *fattore*; and had been seized with a strong and immediate desire to avoid an interview with his creditor. Hence had arisen the direction given to the shop-boy to usher the visitor into the back, or inner room; the purpose of our friend Gino being to slip down the little stair—the position of which has been described—and so escape, to be seen or heard of no more till the *fattore* should be safe on his way back to the Casentino, leaving his subordinate to make what excuse he could to the baulked agriculturist. Had it not been for this well-imagined plan, it is probable that the visitor to the shop on the Ponte Vecchio would not have been invited to enter the back room; for in that retirement, generally safe from all intrusion, were stowed away more than one article which, for one reason or another, it was not expedient for the present to offer for open sale in Florence.

And thus it came to pass that Signor Rappi, tired of looking out of window, and driven, for want of some better amusement, to peer about at whatever was to be seen in the little room, opened the unlocked door of a queer-looking little corner cupboard which attracted his attention, and there saw something which arrested it very much more strongly. The article on which the *fattore*'s eyes fixed themselves with staring astonishment was a small enamelled coffer in the shape of a miniature nave of a church: to practised eyes a reliquary, in short. It was evidently of great antiquity; and the beauty of the enamelled ornamentation was such as to have riveted the attention and delighted the eye of an artistic connoisseur or antiquary. But *fattore* Domenico Rappi was assuredly neither of these things. And yet he stared at the little chest, as if he had never seen so interesting an object. And as he stared, the interest seemed

to grow upon him. Eye-sight was no longer sufficient to satisfy it. And after a little hesitation he put out his hand doubtfully, and took it up for closer examination.

It was a choice specimen of old Lombard work, probably of the twelfth century, in a very remarkable state of preservation; and, if the right purchaser could be hit upon, would be saleable for a very considerable sum. The colours of the enamelled work were as brilliant as on the day when they left the hand of the ancient artificer. And the varied figures of saints which adorned the sides of the little ark were of great interest, as unquestionable documentary evidence of the costume of that dim and distant period. Signor Rappi, however, soon quitting these matters of antiquarian interest, turned the reliquary over in his hand, and gazed steadfastly at the plain unornamented metal bottom of the chest, which was apparently of copper. And there he saw a spot, about the size of a half-dollar, where the surface of the metal had evidently been recently rubbed or scratched. Pursing up his lips, and significantly nodding his head up and down three or four times, he stepped, with the little chest in his hand, to the window, and there, receiving the full, unbroken light of the Italian sunshine on the place which had been tampered with, he distinctly saw the remains of certain marks which the rubbing and scratching had failed entirely to obliterate.

"*Per Bacco!*" said the *fattore* to himself, after he had stood for a minute so, utterly speechless with surprise. Then, after another short space given to consideration, he replaced the reliquary in the cupboard from which he had taken it, and hastily opened the door of communication between the back and front shop. And there, just as he did so, he saw his acquaintance, Gino Sartori, stealthily coming down the narrow stair, and on the point of stealing out of the place by the shop-door. Though thus caught, however, there was nothing to convict him of the intention of giving his visitor the slip. And he prepared to put the best face he could on

the matter respecting which, as he knew very well, the *fattore* had called upon him.

It is needless to occupy space and time with the dialogue that ensued. Of course it took the too-well-known forms of that which is wont to pass between a creditor, and a debtor who is well determined not to pay, but who is anxious to make promises serve the turn of not driving a creditor to extremities. Probably the *fattore* might have insisted longer and more vigorously on his own point of view in this matter, had it not been for his anxiety to come to an explanation on another subject which was now uppermost in his mind.

"When your boy," said Rappi, "told me to wait in the inner room there just now, I did not think I had anything to say to you, Signor Gino, more than what I have been saying; but—just come in here a minute, will you?" added he, leading the way back into the little room he had just left.

The master of the shop followed him in considerable surprise, and not without a certain amount of uncomfortable misgiving—which was increased exceedingly when he saw the *fattore* advance straight to the corner cupboard, open it, and take from it the reliquary of which so much has been said. Sartori made a sudden snatch at it; but the burly *fattore* held it high above his own head, quite out of the other's reach.

"Yes! I dare say! But that sort of thing won't do at all! Now you have got to tell me, Signor Gino Sartori, how this here article came into your keeping."

"I shall tell you nothing of the kind! A pretty sort of thing! To come into a man's private room, and open his cupboards and places, and ask questions about his private affairs, and his way of carrying on his business! Please to hand me that coffer."

Signor Gino did his very best to play his part bravely. But his face had become the colour of a boiled lobster; and the tell-tale blood could not be kept from rushing into it.

"No! I am not going to hand it to you! Not at all so!" said Rappi.

"It will be the worse for you, if you don't, Signor Rappi, and pretty quick too! I am astonished at a prudent man like you to interfere with another man's honest trade in such a way! Why, now, it is to that very article that I am trusting for the means of paying you the money due to you! That came to me in the honest way of trade not a week ago—a great stroke of luck! Such things don't happen to a man in my way of business once in a life-time, hardly; but they *do* happen now and then. It would be a pretty thing if people in my line of business were obliged to let everybody know who they deal with, and where they have made a good find. As well expect a man out a-hunting to tell another fellow where the game lies. But I don't mind telling you that I can sell that there little article for about a hundred times what I gave for it, or more; and the very day it is sold you shall have your money, as sure as the sun is in the sky!"

While speaking thus, the ci-devant inn-keeper succeeded in regaining some degree of composure, and stood with his hand stretched out to receive the casket. But the fattore still held it aloft, and shook his head.

"It won't do, Signor Gino; it won't do! If you won't tell me where you got this, I'll tell you where it came from. This has been stolen out of the sacristy of Marrolo church. Why, bless your heart! I have known this queer-looking bit o' coloured work all my life! I remember it when I was a boy; and the people always thought a deal of it. Sell it for a hundred times what you gave for it! Not at all unlikely, *per Bacco*! And if my recollection of the thing was not enough, here 's the marks at the bottom, and the words, 'Marrolo, 1519'; which all your scraping and scratching have not rubbed out so but what good eyes can still read it. Why, there 's dozens of old people at Marrolo who could swear to the thing. It always used to be put on

the altar on Marrolo *festa* day. But it's many a year since I have seen it. And nowadays, somehow, people don't think so much of such matters as they used to. But this belongs to Marrolo church, and to Marrolo church it will have to go back. So, now, your wisest plan would be to tell how you came by it."

The *fattore* had not uttered all this without sundry attempts at interruption on the part of the "jeweller." But on every such occasion the sturdy agriculturist only raised his voice the more, and raised it to such a pitch that Signor Gino was fain to let him say his say, from the dread that the sounds of altercation would be heard by the passers in the street.

Then at length, after sundry attempts on the part of Signor Gino to settle the matter, "reasonably and amicably," on terms increasingly advantageous to the *fattore*, all which were found to be utterly vain, the truth at last came out. The reliquary had been bought in the way of business by Signor Sartori from Don Neri Vampa, the "vicario" of Marrolo, who had sent the article to him by a sure hand a very short time ago. Of course he—Sartori—had known nothing whatever about how the priest had become possessed of it; had no reason to doubt that it was legally his own property. True, it *did* seem as if attempts had been made to obliterate certain words and marks from the bottom of the casket; but he—Sartori—knew nothing about that; *he* had never touched the bottom of the thing.

The *fattore* admitted that all that might be perfectly true; but the article in question was certainly the property of his parish of Marrolo. Nobody, priest or other, had any right to remove or sell it; and meanwhile he—Signor Rappi—absolutely refused to relinquish possession of it. But Sartori, frightened though he was, would by no means consent to let the much-coveted reliquary pass so easily out of his hands; feeling, as he did, little doubt that, if he did so, he would simply be giving up the prize to another; that nothing more



would ever be heard of the little casket, and that Signor Rappi would simply pocket the proceeds of the sale of it. In these suspicions, which would unfailingly have been the reasonings of a Tuscan of Signor Sartori's class, he did the fattore great wrong. In the first place, with regard to the article itself—of the money value of which Signor Rappi had no more idea than one of his own oxen—the worthy agriculturist had no shadow of any other thought than the restoration of it to his parish church. The old communal feeling, which regarded the property, the rights, the credit, the glory of each man's own commune as his own, is still very strong among the Italians. And thousands of men in all classes might be found, who, little as they might interest themselves about Church affairs in any religious sense, and little as they might care or understand about any article of property in an artistic sense, would exert themselves with eager zeal to prevent any particle whatever of the property of the commune from being made away with or removed. And to this feeling has been due the preservation of many a relic which the greed of priests and sacristans, and the like, would otherwise have sacrificed to the ubiquitous dealers, who are always beating up for the supply of amateurs, and of the museums of Europe and America—whither great numbers of such articles have found their way despite such feeling. But in the second place, Signor Rappi, on hearing Gino's account of the manner in which he had become possessed of the casket, had already conceived a plan of making that knowledge useful to himself in another manner. And furnished with this knowledge, he would have been content to leave the reliquary in the hands of Sartori for the present, had he not been strongly persuaded that in that case it would never more be seen by him, or by anybody whom he could put on the traces of it. Nevertheless he felt that he had no right to insist on simply carrying off the property unauthorized and unwitnessed.

So after a good deal of that wrangling which, to Italians,

always seems to be rather an agreeable occupation for an hour or so than otherwise, the two men came to an agreement, to the effect that Signor Rappi should be intrusted with the keeping of the coffer for the nonce, giving a declaratory receipt for the same to Signor Sartori, while the latter should hand to the *fattore* a written declaration of the circumstances under which he, Sartori, came to be possessed of the object in dispute.

This having been at last settled, the little casket was carefully wrapped up, so that it might not attract the attention of anybody in the street ; and the two men separated, the *fattore* highly pleased at an incident which he hoped might have results more important to him than the recovery of a bit of communal property, dear as Marrolo was to him ; and Signor Gino Sartori in no small degree uneasy as to the possible results of the same unlucky chance to himself.

## CHAPTER IX.

SIGNOR DOMENICO RAPPI had calculated, as has been seen, on leaving Florence by sunrise, and reaching his home in the Casentino in reasonable time the same evening. But, as it turned out, it was past mid-day before he started on his journey ; and it became necessary that he should rest for the night at that same solitary inn on the top of the pass leading from the Val d'Arno into the Casentino at which he and Giulia had made their mid-day halt on the previous day. There was no great misfortune in this. No very special business required the *fattore's* presence at home just then. He knew very well that his wife would not expect him "till she saw him" ; and he was well known at the little inn in question.

Signor Rappi's thoughts during his solitary drive, while the pony was labouring up the long ascent from Pont' à Sieve to the top of the ridge of the hill called the Prato Magno,

turned mainly on his adventure of that morning, and on the mode in which he might best set about turning it to account in the way which had already occurred to him. But it so happened that the same chance which had induced him to defer his departure from the city, by causing him to halt for the night on the road, led to another adventure, of a nature quite as unexpected as that of the Marrolo casket.

Signor Rappi had had his supper, and had sat over his flask of Chianti after it for a somewhat longer time, perhaps, than was usually permitted to him when under the severe and vigilant eye of the Signora Olivia. It was thus rather late when, the flask having been at last finished, the *fattore* betook himself to the bench before the inn-door to enjoy a little of the fresh mountain air, and take the chance of a little gossip with any other loungee, for half-an-hour before going to bed. It was a lovely moonlight night, and though the October air on that bleak height was beginning to be colder than many a Northern man would have liked for sitting out in, the *fattore* lingered, enjoying the "fresco." For it is a remarkable fact that Italians seem to enjoy sitting out of doors in weather that people from the northern side of the Alps would be apt to deem far too cold for the purpose.

The *fattore* sat and sat, watching the moon as she sailed over the wood-covered mountains above Vallombrosa, and the naked, glistening peaks of the Apennines in the opposite direction ; till, just as he was about to turn in, giving up the hope of any more companionship for that night, he heard the distant tinkling of bells on the road in the direction of the Casentino, and determined to wait till he could see whose coming they announced. It was not long before he became aware that the bells were mule-bells ; and the number of them, indicating a cavalcade of at least five or six beasts, left little doubt in the practised *fattore's* mind that the approaching traveller was simply a charcoal-burner, bringing a load of his produce from the forests of the Apennines to Florence. And such was soon seen to be the case.

A solitary charcoal-burner, travelling with his team of mules and cargo of produce by night, from the solitudes of the Apennine forests to the capital, did not, as may be supposed, offer any very good prospect of chat to Signor Domenico Rappi, the wealthy fattore. But just as any vilest raw spirit is better than nothing to a drunkard, the chatter of any human being is better than silence to a thorough-paced Tuscan; and the fattore determined to wait till the charcoal-burner arrived before he went to bed. It was pretty certain that the new-comer would rest himself and his mules for an hour or so, for the lone inn on the Consuma is a regular halting-place for the traffic of all sorts that crosses the mountain.

The charcoal-burners of the Apennines are a wild and rough set of men, very nomadic in their way of life, pursuing their occupation for weeks at a time in the solitudes of the mountain forests, but often moving over the country sufficiently to make them acquainted with a great variety of persons—especially of those classes of persons who themselves live in out-of-the-way places, far from the towns and out of the beaten track. Signor Rappi's movements over the country in the neighbourhood of the properties he managed had made him acquainted more or less with some of these men; but when the person whose approach had been heralded by the music of his mule-bells arrived in front of the inn, he did not turn out to be any one whom Rappi had ever seen before.

That was no reason, however, for abstaining from the expected pleasurable exercise of tongues. And while the mules were getting a mouthful of dusty hay—if the mixture of dried weeds and coarse clover-stalks, which was all the provender the mountain way-side inn afforded, could be called so—and their driver regaled himself with a quarter of a flask of wine on the bench before the door, the fattore and he at once engaged in conversation.

A few years before, the conversation between two Italians

thus casually met would have been confined to the weather, or at most to the price of bread and wine, and the like. It was by no means safe in those days to utter any opinion, or semblance of an opinion, upon any more important subject. But whatever the political changes may have done, or failed to do, for Italy, they have at least had the effect of loosening men's tongues. The Italians may now, at least, talk of all that their rulers do or leave undone, and they have made haste to profit without stint by the new liberty.

The talk between the *fattore* and the black-faced individual who had come out of the night to that mountain trysting-place turned, accordingly, at once upon the subject which was just then the main topic of interest throughout the country-side—the conscription. This led immediately and naturally to the troubled question of the “*refrattari*”—how many such there were, and what the probabilities of their being caught, and what the fate awaiting them if they were caught. And this led the farmer to mention, as a matter that was no secret, but necessarily known to all the country, the arrest of Carlo Sparti.

“What! Carlo at Cerreto, beyond Stia—out there?” cried the charcoal-burner, who, coming from his mountain solitudes, had not heard of the fact. “What’s the trouble with him?—he drew a good number.”

“Oh, you know him, do you? No, he was not drawn, and had no need to run away if he had been. There would have been no difficulty in his paying for a substitute. But there was a fellow, one Paolo Torre, who made himself scarce, and Carlo is accused of having helped him off. And Sparti will give no information about his whereabouts, for the best of all reasons—because he knows nothing about it.”

“Paolo Torre!” exclaimed the charcoal-burner; “ah! they won’t catch him in a hurry. And if they skin Carlo alive, he can’t tell them anything about it. Ho! ho! ho!” grinned the white teeth out of the black face.

“But it’s a regular shame—*proprio una maledizione di Dio*—

that such a fellow as Carlo Sparti should be lying in prison for such an animal as that Paolo Torre!" said the *fattore*, indignantly.

"So it is, Signor mia!—so it is, sure enough! I know them both! Many a wet night I've had shelter and supper at Carlo's farm, and Paolo is no good to anybody. If the conscription only took such fellows as he, there would be small harm done!"

"I tell you what," returned the *fattore*, after a pause, "I wouldn't mind paying five hundred francs down, out of my own pocket, to any one who would put me in the way of finding Paolo Torre. Not that I wish any harm to him, but I should like to get Carlo out of his scrape. I am Domenico Rappi, the *fattore* at Marrolo, and the five hundred francs would not break me."

The charcoal-burner lifted his rabbit-skin cap as the *fattore* named himself. He knew the *fattore* perfectly well by reputation, and all about him—knew that his promise to pay five hundred francs was quite as good as any bank-note to that amount. The proposition was a very tempting one—and he, too, on his part, would not be sorry to do Carlo Sparti a good turn; though he had the strong dislike of all Italian men of his class to lend any hand to help the law and the authorities against any contravener of it.

"Well," said the man, after a long pause, during which he tossed down the last drop of his quarter-flask of wine, "I know where Paolo Torre is at this minute, and I know who it was that helped him to get off. But I don't like to have nothing to do with the law and the Government and the *carabinieri*, and such like. I never knew any good to come from having anything to say to them. Quite the contrary. But telling you is not telling them. You will do with the information as you think fit. I don't ask no questions about it. I only mention the thing to you in the way of talk; and—I suppose you have no need to say who told you?" added the black-faced man, with a meaning look out of his eyes, the

whites of which looked so large and ghastly in the black face.

"You tell me where to find Paolo Torre, and tell me who helped him to his hiding-place, and I will give you five hundred francs as soon as I know that he is where you say he is; and, I give you my hand on it, I will say no word who told me. I am the *fattore* at Marrolo, and my word is my bond."

"Yes, Signor Domenico, I know that. But mayhap I had better not come to Marrolo for the five hundred francs. Would you mind bringing them to Meo Scarpa's *trattoria*,\* at Poppi, as soon as you have satisfied yourself that I have told you the truth?"

"All right. So be it. I know Meo Scarpa's *trattoria* very well; and I will bring the money there without fail. So, now, where is Signor Paolo Torre?"

"Paolo Torre," said the charcoal-burner, lowering his voice to a whisper, and looking cautiously round to see that no eavesdropping ears were within hearing, "is, at this present speaking, at the Priory of Sant' Agnese, in Valtorta, behind Stia, under Falterona. Perhaps you don't know Sant' Agnese? Few do. It is a very out-of-the-way place—capital place for hiding."

Sant' Agnese was, indeed, a capital place for hiding, whether from the poms and vanities of the world or from the law and the *carabinieri*. It was a very small and very poor little oratory or priory belonging to a convent of Franciscans, itself very poor, in the little town of Prato Vecchio. It was situated, as the charcoal-burner had said, behind Stia, another little town in the Casentino, and the first by the walls of which the infant Arno passes after its descent from its sources in the sides of Falterona. But it was a long way behind Stia—some ten miles or so within the recesses of a little, narrow, winding valley—Valtorta, as it is named, from the sinuosities of it—which cleaves the flank of Falte-

\* Eating-house of the lower order.

rona, the highest point of the Apennines in that neighbourhood, from whose sides, in opposite directions, both the Arno and the Tiber flow. Rarely, indeed, did any feet, save those of the four or five poor Franciscans who inhabited the spot, penetrate the recesses of Valtorta. Why should they? For the path, such as it was, led nowhither save to the half-dilapidated little priory. And it seemed impossible to guess why even that humble establishment should exist there, unless it were that the founders of it had been tempted by the possibility of obtaining a few vegetables from a small, level bit of fertile land, formed by a bend of the valley, and the alluvial soil deposited there by the little stream that ran through it.

The Italian Government has been accused of being in a far greater hurry to turn the non-mendicant monks, who possessed property, and from whom, therefore, something was to be got, out of their monasteries, than it was to meddle with the poor mendicants, who, once turned out of their nests upon the world, had to be kept from starving by the State. However this may be, certain it is that many communities of mendicants have been allowed to remain in their monasteries; and the few poor old men who inhabited the miserable little building in the Valtorta had perhaps escaped observation—had, at all events, been allowed to stay where they were.

To make all possible opposition to the law of the conscription, to give as much trouble to the Government, and to aid as many men as possible to escape from its provisions was, as has been said, the special policy of the clergy. And of course the recluses of Sant' Agnese were ready and willing to do all in their power for the advancement of the good cause.

Signor Rappi had never been at Sant' Agnese, but he easily understood, from his companion's description, the exact locality of it. His plan was to avoid, if possible, the use of force; for Signor Rappi, like most of his countrymen, was very averse from coming into contact in any way with



the law and its myrmidons, if he could possibly avoid it. He proposed going himself to Sant' Agnese, and seeing whether he could not bring such persuasions to bear on the refrattario as might induce him to give himself up, and clear Sparti of the accusation which weighed upon him. But the charcoal-burner had not yet done all that was requisite for the earning of the five hundred francs. He had promised to tell by whose help Paolo had been enabled to find an asylum.

"Yes, Signor Fattore, I said I would tell that too, and so I will. It was part of our bargain. Of course I depend on you never to breathe a word who told you. That would never do, you know! Devil another bag of charcoal should I sell! These priests, you know, have long arms!"

"*A chi lo dite?*"\* You need not tell me that, my friend. You may depend upon me for making no mischief. Ah! the priests had a hand in it? I thought as much," said the fattore.

"Yes. You might ha' sworn to that. It was your own priest, Signor Verini. Leastways it was he that planned it and ordered it. He is too big a man to put his own hand to it, you understand. But it was he that told the vicario, Signor Vampa, and old Nistri, the sacristan, what to do. That same night he was at Sparti's farm, when they were seen together—and that was the Priore's contriving, too, that they should be seen together—Paolo was hid in the vicar's house; and at midnight or a little after he and Nistri went up to Sant' Agnese, with a word from the Priore that they were to keep him snug till further orders. And there you will find him, let the frati say what they will. And now, Signor Fattore, I have earned my five hundred francs, have I not?"

"If I find Paolo there, you have earned them, and shall have them—or if he has been there in hiding at all," said Rappi.

"Oh, you will find him there still. And now, Signor

\* "*To whom do you tell it?*" a common form of assent in Tuscany.

Fattore, I must be going, or I shall be late at Florence to-morrow morning. Remember Scarpa's trattoria at Poppi!" And so the two men parted, and the fattore went to bed.

## CHAPTER X.

SIGNOR RAPPI went to his bed at the way-side inn on the Consuma, purposing to pass through Stia on his way home the next morning, and to leave his bagherino and pony there, while he made his way up the valley to Sant' Agnese on foot, in search of the hidden deserter.

At the same time, poor little Giulia's first day in the gloomy house in the Mercato Nuovo had wearily come to an end, and she had gone to the little closet appointed for her bed-chamber. Never since Giulia had been born, probably, had a day of her life ever passed before without a laugh in it. And Giulia began to look forward to the time she would have to remain beneath her aunt's roof with something like terror. Not much laughing could be advantageously done in the presence of the fattoressa and of her sister Olivia, it is true. But, then, she was not always in their presence. There was her father; there were the fields, the neighbours, the liberty of the country, the open air. There was nothing of all this in the Mercato Nuovo; and it was very, very dreary, indeed. To laugh, to smile, even, in the presence of her aunt, seemed about as possible and as congruous as a guffaw by a death-bed. The Signora Manforti had no intention to be otherwise than kind to her niece; but there are people whose mere presence in a room suffices effectually to banish all mirth, joy, or gladness. Gloom seems to emanate by some secret process from their persons, and cheerfulness to die away around them as a light goes out in a mephitic atmosphere. And the Signora Manforti was one of these persons. It was that special gift that peculiarly adapted her for her rôle in

life. It was not her devoteeship that had made her gloomy; but her gloom-distilling power that had set her up as a devotee.

And there was, as far as Giulia could see, no possibility, or prospect of a possibility, of passing any of the hours of the long day out of her aunt's society. It was a dreadful prospect, which even the vision of Carlo Sparti, seen at the far end of a long vista of such days as that just come to an end, could hardly render endurable. There had been no question of going out to mass, as Giulia had supposed might probably be the case. It seemed that Signora Manforti was in the habit of doing so only on Sundays and Church festivals. About seven o'clock in the morning a little oval brazen waiter, with two miniature tin coffee-pots, each holding one very small cupful of coffee, two not very brilliantly clean glasses, and two little portions of sugar, was brought from a neighbouring café. Not a drop of milk, not a morsel of bread, accompanied the two little cups. And this was what Signora Manforti, like the generality of her class in Florentine homes, considered to be the materials of a breakfast. Giulia, in her country home, had been accustomed to a good plate of soup, with plenty of bread, a morsel of meat, and then some good fruit afterward, for her breakfast, at an hour somewhat later than the miserable cup of black coffee had made its appearance. And she flattered herself that the coffee was an extra city luxury, and that the breakfast would come in its due season. But she was soon disabused of all imaginations of that kind. When the two little cups of coffee had been swallowed, the Signora Manforti invited her niece to go through the litanies to the Virgin. They knelt down at a faldstool, which the lady of the house dragged out from its place against the wall, and placed in front of the little picture with its lamp, which has been described, and there went through the performance. The Signora Manforti led off in a nasal sing-song, which Giulia was expected audibly to accompany. After a good hour had been passed

in this exercise of the lungs, Signora Manforti explained to her niece that it was her custom after the recitation of the litanies to give an hour to contemplation. And Giulia heard the decree with delight ; for she conceived that it promised her the infinite relief of getting away for a brief space, if only to such peace as was to be found in the dull little closet which was her sleeping-chamber. But she soon found that she was mistaken in this respect. It appeared that she was expected to contemplate in her aunt's company. So both the women sat down with their hands before them, in the deadly silent and desperately gloomy little room. And the Signora Manforti shut her eyes. Anybody acquainted with the play of the facial muscles would have known that she was not asleep. There was a tight, vicious-looking screwing of the eyelids together that was not the appearance of sleep. But poor Giulia was deceived. She felt very much inclined to go to sleep herself, and she supposed that her aunt had done so. The sitting there in absolute immobility and rest, which was not repose, became intolerable to her. And, cautiously glancing at her aunt, she rose from her chair, and was creeping on tiptoe toward the window. To look out at the life in the Mercato Nuovo would at least be better than the "contemplation" to which she had been condemned. But suddenly her aunt opened her eyes to their widest extent, and in a deep tone said, "Giulia ! what are you about ? You are disturbing my thoughts and your own ! Return, I beg of you, to your devout contemplation immediately ! And do not forget to mention your distraction in your next confession. The penance will not be a light one !"

Giulia crept back to her chair, and recommenced her "contemplation." It probably was occupied by Carlo Sparti, and the probable nature of the penance she had incurred, turn about.

Then after the "contemplation" came a yet severer ordeal—the visit of the Reverend Egidio Baldini, the confessor and 'director' of the Signora Manforti. Giulia was, of course

presented to the reverend gentleman in due form, and was surprised—which a little reflection ought to have prevented her from being—at finding how thoroughly informed the priest was about her and all that concerned her: the “holy vocation to which she was destined,” and the obstacles which had unhappily tended to make that high calling appear for the moment less acceptable to her than it doubtless would seem in her eyes when the divine grace should have duly opened them. More strangely still, the Reverend Egidio Baldini knew all about Carlo Sparti—so far, at least, as concerned his arrest and the cause of it. He seemed to know, moreover—speaking of it as a matter generally talked of in Florence—that the Government had a very strong case against him; that his conduct was deemed to have been peculiarly flagitious; and that doubtless he was a disgraced and utterly ruined man. Then came the making of an appointment for a day and hour when Giulia should perform the sacred duty of confession; and an intimation on the part of the priest that he should consider it a part of his duty to confer with her for an hour daily on the state of her mind, and her religious duties and prospects generally.

The Reverend Egidio Baldini was a soft, douce-mannered, roundabout little man, anything but terrible or even harsh in his appearance. Nevertheless, before he went away, he had, somehow, inspired Giulia with both fear and strong dislike. Painful as it had been to hear all that the man had said, and the more that he had insinuated about Carlo, Giulia had bravely kept her own counsel, striving hard that no indication of emotion of any sort—no expression of face whatever—should betray to the skilled and vigilant eyes that were watching her anything of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, or of the fears, and yet less of the jealously guarded hopes, which were treasured in her heart.

It was very evident, however, that the “discipline” in store for her under her aunt’s roof would be no light infliction, and she fervently prayed that the days of it might be

shortened—a prayer the fervency of which was doubtless not diminished by the fact that the expected end of her probation was to come in the shape of the appearance of Carlo Sparti as her deliverer.

And thus the sad days in that saddest of all homes wore on ; and if it were really true that mirth is sinful, and that our little Giulia's laughter-loving face had dimpled with smiles too habitually during all the years of her previous life in the free air of the sunny Casentino, the utterly gloomy and joyless days of her sojourn in her aunt's house may be considered to have made atonement for all such gladness. According to the code of those whose happiness depends almost wholly upon the due satisfaction of their material wants, who know nothing of depression or elevation of animal spirits, and are in no degree dependent for their daily happiness on the faces and tones of those around them, the Signora Manforti was kind to her niece. She always had a sufficiency of good food—except, indeed, on Wednesdays and Fridays—no sort of toil was imposed upon her—she would have been happier if she had had any reasonable work to do—no rough word was ever said to her, only a continual stone-wearing drop, drop, drop of a perennial trickling preaching. But the worst and most dreaded hours of the day were those of her interviews with the Reverend Egidio Baldini—and these were well-nigh intolerable. In short, the life was such that Giulia very soon learned to consider the brief space which she was permitted to pass within the four walls of her gloomy little chamber as by far the happiest of her life.

As for the roses in her cheeks, they were soon things of the past. The light in those bright eyes, that Carlo had so often told her would suffice to ripen the vintage if the sun should chance to go out, held out somewhat longer ; but that, too, was beginning to fade. The quick, elastic step had, to the great satisfaction and gravely expressed approval of the Signora Manforti, been quelled and tamed to the slow,

dead-alive movement that seemed alone proper to that sepulchre of a house. And the curve of the lovely rounded cheek was beginning to be concave instead of convex.

Hasten your movements, worthy *fattore*, for things are going harder with your little Casentino wild-flower than you think for ! Strive, good Carlo—strive the best you may to free yourself from your bonds, or it may be that you will come too late to claim the prize that is waiting for you !

The *fattore*, to do him justice, was by no means disposed to let the grass grow under his feet in following up the clue which the chance meeting with the charcoal-burner had put into his hand. It had been his intention, immediately on arriving at Stia, on the morning after his meeting with the charcoal-burner, to leave his little gig and the pony there, and make his way up the Valtorta to Sant' Agnese on foot. But, unfortunately, on reaching Stia, he was met there by a man on the look-out for him, with the intelligence that the owner of the principal property managed by him had arrived at his villa from Florence, and was anxious to see his *fattore* as soon as possible. And Signor Domenico was thus obliged to defer his proposed visit to the priory of Sant' Agnese to another day. But the stay of the "Padrone" in the Casentino prolonged itself for some weeks, and it thus came to pass that this "other day" was not reached so soon as the *fattore* had hoped.

And in the mean time a diversion (using the word in only one of its senses, and not at all in the other) occurred, which, although it brought some little change into the life of little Giulia, could hardly be said to have in any degree improved it.

The matter fell out in this wise.

No sooner had Giulia disappeared from the home of the *fattore* at Marrolo, and from the Casentino, than certain noticeable changes in the behaviour of Signor Simone Bossi led to an interview, in the first place, between the Signora Olivia and her spiritual director, the Priore ; and, in the

second place, between the latter personage and Signor Bossi. In fact, the Signora Olivia thought it expedient to make the Priore aware that her proposed son-in-law was manifesting a remarkable falling-off in his assiduity at the farm, and that when he did come there his manner seemed changed—especially toward her daughter Olivia—and that—hum!—she, the Signora Olivia, did not know what to make of it, and did not like the look of it.

The Priore, while commending her for speaking to him upon the subject, had rather pooh-poohed her misgivings, telling her that all would come right, &c. But he had nevertheless thought it well to have a conversation himself with his friend, Signor Bossi, upon the subject.

And this conversation soon showed the experienced Priore that the difficulties ahead, in carrying out their combined plans, were likely to prove greater, rather than less, than his fellow-plotter, the Signora Olivia, had feared. In a word, it became evident that Signor Bossi, while obediently frequenting the *fattore's* house for the purpose of paying his addresses to the Signorina Olivia, had fallen desperately in love with the Signorina Giulia!

Here was a subject for preaching and rebuking. What! when he, the Priore, had used all his influence to obtain for him the hand of a young lady every way so desirable as Olivia Rappi! What! to turn the opportunities afforded him for approaching one daughter into a means of making love to another! What! to neglect and put a gross affront on one who was everything that her spiritual directors could wish, for the sake of a girl of a thoroughly reprobate nature, a union with whom would be highly disapproved of by the Church in every respect.

But the Priore forbore, and said none of these things. Those who are acquainted with the relationship between the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church and their flocks know perfectly well that, even in the case of their most devout members, the clergy use whip and rein after a very different



fashion in dealing with the two sexes. More especially is this the case as regards the young of either sex. And Don Ignazio Verini, the Priore of Marrolo, was not a man to make any mistake in this matter. Signor Simone Bossi was a strong partisan; a hater of the new-fangled notions and of the liberal cause; a friend to the priests; a great professor of religion; and one who, some fifty years hence, might be expected to have neither a will of his own nor scarcely a shilling of which the Church would not be the master. But, notwithstanding all this, the Priore knew that it would be useless to hope to bend or break the will of the young man of five-and-twenty, as he might hope to bend or break that of a girl—as he did fully purpose to bend or break that of poor Giulia Rappi. And, like a skilful general, without altogether abandoning his original plan, he forthwith turned his mind to the possibilities of doing the best that could be done with the materials before him. And within five minutes of the moment in which it had become apparent to his mind that Simone did want to marry Giulia, and did not want to marry Olivia, he had conceived a project of marrying him to the fattore's youngest daughter, and perhaps obtaining thus a greater eventual power over the income that would be Signor Bossi's from the discordance in views and dispositions between husband and wife than could have been enjoyed in consequence of his marriage with Olivia. In that case, Olivia must go into a nunnery; and perhaps it would, after all, be easier to accomplish that, religious-minded and submissive as Olivia was, than to force Giulia into a cloister against her will. So when Signor Bossi confessed that it was his intention to proceed to Florence, with a view to prosecuting his suit for the Signorina Giulia's hand, the Priore offered him a letter to the Signora Manforti, and wrote a despatch, "long and particular," as the attorneys say, to the Reverend Egidio Baldini, explaining to him the state of the case, and prescribing to him a line of conduct in accordance with the necessities of it.

And thus it came to pass that, when four or five days of the life in the house in the Mercato Nuovo which has been described had pretty well reduced Giulia to a semi-comatose state of hopelessness and misery and torpidity, there came that "diversion" in her life which was occasioned by the appearance of Signor Simone Bossi in the Signora Manforti's house, and by the frequent opportunities which were allowed him of seeing her.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE "diversion" which had thus come into the life of the drooping and pining Giulia was not a very diverting one. The persevering love-making of one man, when a maiden's heart and troth are plighted to another, is not apt to be found amusing. But in Giulia's case the matter was worse than merely this; and no little firmness and resolution were needed to hold the course she had marked out for herself without swerving. For the foremost and constantly urged argument by which Bossi sought to push his suit was the positively asserted intelligence that Carlo Sparti had been condemned to imprisonment in the fortress of Volterra for fifteen years. And this news was fully confirmed by the Reverend Egidio Baldini. Thus assured of a fact which she had been previously told as likely enough to happen, and hearing nothing from her father or from Carlo, it never occurred to little Giulia to doubt the truth of the statement. From her father she heard nothing, for the reason that the reader is aware of. The fattore was hoping from day to day that the return of his employer to Florence would leave him at liberty to pay his contemplated visit to Sant' Agnese, and return to his daughter in triumph with the means of setting her lover at liberty in his hand. From Carlo, of course, she could hear nothing, because, in the first place, he was, as we know, in durance vile; and, in the second place,

because, even if he had been at liberty, it would have been no easy matter for him to find any means of communicating with her in the house of the Signora Manforti.

Then began, also, a series of attacks from her aunt. If, indeed, it were the case—which it seemed very difficult to the Signora Manforti to believe—that Giulia was averse to the holy condition of life for which she had been intended, here was an alternative offered to her by the indulgence of her family, and the thoughtful consideration of her spiritual superiors, in the shape of a marriage which any girl in her position might well jump at. A more unexceptionable, a more charming young man in every respect than Signor Simone Bossi, the Signora Manforti had never seen. A landed proprietor, too! And a thoroughly pious young man into the bargain! What could any girl wish more? For her own part, the Signora Manforti was disposed to consider that, seeing what the world was, the life of a cloister was the happiest that could fall to a female's lot. But here was a choice for her niece between the two alternatives—Signor Simone Bossi, or the veil. Evidently any third possibility was absolutely out of the question. And then came the priest, with more cleverly and insidiously urged arguments tending to the same end. Signor Manforti, too, in the long evenings when he came home from the cereria, added his contribution to the combined attack upon poor Giulia. The wax-chandler, for his part, was quite incredulous as to the possibility of any girl choosing to go into a nunnery rather than accept such a position as Signor Bossi's wife. Why, of course, she would take him! As for that other, of whom he had heard something, they would none of them set eyes on him for the next fifteen years at least—and a good job, too; for, by all accounts, he was as worthless a young scamp as there was in Tuscany.

Yes, it was a hard time for poor Giulia; and terribly changed she was both in mind and looks from what she had been in the free old Casentino days. That her eyes would

never again rest on Carlo Sparti, for the next fifteen years at least—quite as good, or rather as bad, as an eternity to poor little Giulia's eighteen-year-old mind—she entirely believed; and the belief was breaking her heart. But if all the others who had access to her—uncle, aunt, and confessor—were working hard to drive her into the acceptance of Signor Bossi's hand, that gentleman himself was doing his utmost to keep the memory of Sparti fresh in her heart by his own frequent presence. He would have acted more wisely to keep himself in the background. But he was active in his wooing. And this did much toward convincing Giulia that a convent was the preferable lot of the two.

In the mean time things were hastening to a *dénouement* in the Casentino in more highly unexpected ways than one.

Soon after the Priore's conversation with Signor Bossi had led that reverend gentleman to conceive the change in his plans which has been described, he judged it expedient to have an interview with the Signorina Olivia Rappi. To be sure, the Priore's plans only concerned her so far as was implied in the circumstance that her professed lover was to be married to her sister, and she was to be sent into a nunnery instead of becoming a wife. And to such a holy-minded and docile daughter of the Church as Olivia had always shown herself, it was not to be anticipated that these little changes—all for the glory of God and the good cause—would be at all disagreeable; still less that she would dream of making any opposition to them. Nevertheless, the Priore thought it well, in the plenitude of his indulgent consideration, to let that model young lady, the favourite lamb of all his flock, know the changes in her destiny which awaited her.

The Signorina Olivia had not been pleased at the absence of Signor Bossi at Florence. It had not unfrequently happened that certain hesitating and furtive demonstrations on his part of a tendency to pay more attention to Giulia than Olivia deemed to be altogether proper under the circumstances, had called a darkling shade over the holy calm of

that saintly brow and Madonna-like face, and had been the occasion of subsequent sharp words and sisterly taunts and insinuations, which, in truth, Giulia had been far from deserving. But no feeling of jealousy of this kind had been awakened in her mind by Bossi's absence from home, though she resented it; for she felt very certain that there would be no question or possibility of his seeing Giulia in the house of the Signora Manforti.

When, therefore, in obedience to the Priore's request that she would call upon him—always an honour and a pleasure to so thoroughly right-thinking and well-disposed a girl as Olivia—she walked up the hill to the terrace on which the church and the Priore's house stood, one fine afternoon, through the vineyards, from which the grapes had now all been gathered in, her handsome dark brow wore its accustomed placid calm, and the lines about the beautiful mouth and eyes expressed a pleasurable anticipation of her interview with the fascinating Priore, who, she doubted not, had something pleasant to communicate to her respecting Signor Simone, and the approaching arrangements for her betrothal to him.

How little did the Madonna-like Olivia dream, when old Assunta smilingly met her at the Priore's door, and told her with a pleasantly understanding look that his reverence was waiting for her in his study, that from the end of one more short quarter of an hour, never more would happiness or peace or charity be present to her heart! never more would the saint-like beauty of her face be the reflex of aught save the furies of jealousy, hatred, and despair!

The Priore was not long in saying what he had to say. He met her smilingly, and with a manner of the most cordially paternal affection and skilfully expressed favouritism. A few excellently well-turned words on the beauties of the character which he had marked with ever-increasing pleasure in Olivia from her cradle upward—on the happiness and glory of living entirely to God, and for the furtherance of the good cause and the welfare of His Church—on that truly

beautiful and celestial tranquillity of mind and heart, which had always marked Olivia as one of those choice and chosen natures, whose whole being is set on things eternal, rather than on the perishable miseries of this transitory world—formed his exordium. And then he quietly and shortly told her of the slight change in his views respecting her, which circumstances, and the interests of the good cause, and the Church's welfare, had led him to adopt.

After all, the members of a celibate priesthood—be they good or be they bad, correct or licentious in conduct, worldly or “other-worldly”—can never know much of the sex with which they can have no legitimate intercourse. Had Don Ignazio Verini been aught but a priest, he would have been less astonished than he was at the result which his communication to the saintly Olivia produced. Those whose knowledge of mankind, and especially of womankind, is somewhat more extensive than was that of the Priore, know well how exceedingly deceptive are those indications of passionlessness which depend on the outline and shape of the features, and that calm of a mind which, like a deep, still pool, is pellucidly quiescent only because no storm-wind has ever as yet swept over it. Now the storm-wind had come with terribly sudden force; and Siddons—great artist as she was—or Ristori—great tragédienne as she is—might have studied the scene that followed with profit to their art.

It was appalling; and the Priore, little as he was wont to be moved or influenced by the movements of human hearts, was for the moment appalled.

One has heard of a tigress bereft of her young, or a miser robbed of his gold, as examples of despair and fury. But in these cases the passion which rages is not complex—is one and simple. But the raging fury which shook Olivia, as the storm shakes the aspens, was compounded of sundry passions, some of which were wholly noxious in their nature. Had she been told simply that she was to give up her lover and take the veil, no doubt she would have been violent in

her wrath. But the doom which was announced to her was a much worse one. The man whom she had been taught to look upon as her lover, almost as her affianced husband, had been basely making of her a mere blind and opportunity for wooing her sister ! And this treason, this infamy was to be permitted, ratified, accepted ! It was to succeed—to triumph ! What had *her* life been ? and what had Giulia's life been ? And now the reward which was due to the virtue of the one was to be given to the perversity of the other. She was to be supplanted, disgraced !—made second to Giulia !

But no ! It should never, never be ! She would show them all that they had erred in imagining that she was one who could be so treated. It was wicked ! It was infamous ! It was the vilest hypocrisy to pretend to say that such atrocities were for the glory of God !

The Priore was astonished, dismayed ; but not for long. He admitted to himself that he had mistaken the nature of the effect such tidings as those he had announced were likely to have on the female mind. But he by no means admitted the idea that it was beyond his power to dominate, control, and bend this disturbed heart to his will. Of course the paroxysm would pass. He ought to have calculated better the nature of the action of disappointment. For the nonce he set himself to soothe the raging of the passionate girl's heart. He assured her—and himself—that he was deaf to all the injurious abuse she hurled at him ; and finally dismissed her, taking the precaution to send Assunta down the hill with her to her home, and telling her that he should come and see her there shortly, when he should, he doubted not, find her in a better and calmer frame of mind.

To himself he never for a moment admitted the possibility of a doubt that he should eventually succeed in arranging all these matters in the way the exigencies of the case seemed to require ; though supposing that the doing so might perhaps cost him somewhat more trouble than he had imagined.

Had he marked and been able to read aright all the

meanings there were in the last glance which those large dark eyes flashed at him from beneath their thunder-laden brows, as she left his presence, he might perhaps have judged differently.

Assunta could make nothing of it, as she wonderingly executed her master's orders to accompany the young lady to her home. She could not succeed in getting one word from her during the walk; and under these new and strange circumstances the old woman, instead of going in to have a chat with her gossip, the Signora Rappi, judged it more desirable to part company at the threshold.

Olivia turned stormfully to her own chamber. To her mother's wondering question as to what was amiss, she replied, as she shut and locked her door, that her mother had better ask the Priore. And then, absolutely and fiercely refusing to leave the shelter of her room, she passed the remaining hours of that miserable day in torment, such as might, with more propriety than that with which the phrase is often used, in speaking of human wretchedness, be called the torments of the damned.

It was a bit of good fortune for the *fattore* that he chanced not to be at home that afternoon. He had at length been able to start on his proposed expedition to Sant' Agnese in the Valtorta. It was possible, as he was aware, that the *refrattario* of whom he was in search might have changed his quarters. But it was not likely. For it could hardly be that he could find another so good a hiding-place. In the mean time Signor Rappi had said no word about the little enamelled coffer belonging to Marrolo church; but had kept it carefully locked up in his strong box at home, intending to bring forward his two heads of accusation against his spiritual pastors together, the more to strengthen his attack.

It was much about the same hour that the unhappy Olivia was setting forth on her walk up the hill to visit the Priore, that her father was making his way on foot up the Valtorta,



and was approaching the solitary little hermitage. Well as he knew the country for miles around, the *fattore* had never before been in the Valtorta, so out of the way was the spot. There was no danger of missing the way, however. The narrow little valley had but one path, which hardly deserved to be called such, and that led nowhither, save to the priory of Sant' Agnese. It was about the hour of vespers as he came to a turn in the valley, which he had no sooner rounded than he heard the cracked jingling of a little bell, and in the next minute could see it swinging in a small, open, and half-ruined campanile, above the desolate-looking and dilapidated little buildings of the priory. In its best days the building must have been a very humble one. It consisted of a tiny little church, with an open loggia of three arches at its west front, which imparted a picturesque appearance to the fabric, and of a low chamber built against the southern side of the church, by way of a common room or refectory, with some half-dozen little bits of cells over it. Behind the church—at the east end of it, that is to say—was the most dreary and desolate-looking little cemetery that can be conceived; and opening into this, and niched under the eaves of the church, were a confused mass of nondescript buildings, that seemed to have a mixed character between stables, poultry-sheds, and mortuary chambers. The whole place seemed as if a walking-stick might have sufficed to dislodge the stones one from above the other. The mortar all appeared to have been eaten out from between them by long exposure to rain and frost and wind, and in the place of it an abundance of moss and lichens clothed the rickety old wall with a more picturesque if less valuable substitute. With the exception of a small quadrangle of soil, enclosed by a low wall of loose stones gathered from the adjacent hill-side, in which there were a few miserable cabbages, there was no vestige of cultivation about the place.

Nor was there a living soul to be seen. But the little bell, pulled by an unseen hand, jingled on its cracked summons to

the evening office. The western door of the church stood open, and the fattore walked in.

And there, kneeling before a bench near the door, was—the man he was in search of.

## CHAPTER XII.

WITH the exception of two cowed figures, also kneeling before a faldstool in front of the altar, at the other end of the church, the refrattario was the only living creature in the building.

In the dead silence which prevailed, the lusty fattore's heavy tread on the flag-stone pavement re-echoed through the little church, telling clearly enough that the unusual sound came from no sandalled foot, and that the extraordinary circumstance of some stranger having found his way to Sant' Agnese had occurred. The sound came as a cry of warning to the guilty ears of the refrattario, and he instantly started from his knees, and was making, quick as thought, for the eastern end of the church, which doubtless communicated with some of the hiding-places at the back of it.

But the fattore was not to be done in that fashion. With an active spring forward, he succeeded in clutching the collar of the man he wanted, and Paolo Torre soon found that it was useless to attempt to struggle out of the grip that held him. At the noise of the scuffle, the two monks at the farther end of the church had risen from their knees, and came forward to the spot where the fattore and the deserter were standing.

"Signor," said one of these men, "this is a church! Pray do not make it the scene of violence!"

"Certainly not, *padre mio*!" returned the fattore; "but I came here to look for this man, who is an offender against the law, and I cannot let him go again. If he will come

quietly out of the church we can talk about it outside. I don't want to harm him."

The friar who had previously spoken said a word or two in a low tone to the refrattario, and the latter then suffered himself to be led quietly out of the church into the little loggia in front of the western door of it, followed by the two friars.

"Now," said the *fattore*, when they were in the full light of the afternoon sun, which was pouring into the loggia a flood of light nearly blinding to eyes just emerged from the dimness of the church—"Now, Signor Paolo Torre! I know you well enough, you see! You did not like to go for a soldier, eh? Well, I have nothing to say against that—I should not like it myself. But then, you know, there's the law. The law says you must go. Says you, 'No, I won't!' Well, I have nothing to say to that neither. It is not my business to do the work of the *carabinieri* for them. I am a *fattore*, I am, as all the Casentino knows; and not a *gendarme*, nor a bit like one. But the trouble, you see, is that you have got another man into a scrape by bolting, and he one that never did you or anybody else a bad turn, but many a good one, on the contrary—and that's Carlo Sparti. Now, look you, Carlo is a friend of mine, and the lawyers have got him hard and fast in limbo at Florence, all along of this job of yours—and that won't do noways! And that's why I have put myself out of my way to look you up, my lad! So, now, you have got to come right off to Florence along with me, and let 'em know that Carlo Sparti was noways to blame for your giving the conscription the slip—and that's all about it!"

The refrattario and the two monks looked at each other in silence, while the *fattore*, with his eye sharply watching every movement of his man, awaited the result of his speech.

At last the deserter, with a sullen but half-doubting manner, glancing up from under his eyebrows, said,—

"But, Signor Domenico—I know you well enough, as well

as every man, woman, and child in the Casentino—you say well that you are not one of the carabinieri, and I don't see that there's any of 'em anywhere hereabouts; and I don't think I am any way disposed to go to Florence—thanking you all the same."

"Aha, my lad! that's your game, is it? Well, now, look here, Paolo Torre, and let's see whether it is a head or a pumpkin that you've got on your shoulders. No, there are no carabinieri here nowhere about that I know of. There's nobody but yourself, and these gentlemen, your friends, and Domenico Rappi, the *fattore* of Marrolo. But, all the same for that, I mean to take you with me to Florence. Now, what's the good of talking? You'd fain have given me the slip in the church just now, when I laid my hand on your collar—but you didn't, you know, and I don't think you would if you were to try it again. No, nor bolting won't do!" added the *fattore*, suddenly making a catch at the deserter's collar, and firmly grasping it, as his eye caught the signs of a purpose of that sort moving in Paolo's mind. "And I don't think these reverend gentlemen, sorry as they will be to lose your company, will choose to meddle in such a job as rescuing a deserter. So you had better come along quietly. I have got my trap at the foot of the valley, and we can be in Florence comfortably by early to-morrow morning; and I will give you a better supper at the *Consuma* to-night than you have had since you have been in your present quarters, I'll answer for it."

The deserter looked wistfully at the two monks. But there was not the slightest sign of any intention on the part of his hosts to run any such risk on their guest's behalf as the *fattore* had alluded to. He glanced uneasily at the burly figure of the *fattore*, looked round at the barren and desolate hills, which shut in the dreary-looking little valley and its lonely and dilapidated priory, and then said,—

'Well Signor Domenico, since you wish it, and since you are good enough to speak of some supper—a thing these

gentlemen here are too holy to care about—I suppose I may as well go with you.”

“Bravo! We may as well be off at once, then. We must just walk down to the foot of the valley. You won’t object to walking just a pace in front—I couldn’t be so uncivil as to go first, on no account. And, look here! just bear in mind that any good citizen is justified in shooting down a deserter who is escaping; and remember that I have one of those playthings in my pocket” (showing him, as he spoke the words, the muzzle of a revolver in his coat pocket), “and we shall have as pleasant a journey as can be. Good evening, *Padri miei!*” he added to the monks, as he turned his face down the valley, with his prize a step in front of him.

The fattore was as good as his word at the inn on the top of the hill which divides the Casentino from the Val d’Arno, called the Consuma; and the journey to Florence was a pleasant one, at least to one of the travellers. But it is needless to give any detailed account of it, or of the matter-of-course steps which Signor Domenico took on arriving in Florence with his capture. Suffice it that, as a matter of course, he had no difficulty in setting poor Carlo at liberty. It was not accomplished that day; for Italian officials will not be hurried, even though a much more important matter than the liberty of a Casentino contadino had been at stake. But on the next day but one Carlo stood with his good friend and hoped-for father-in-law a free man on the flag-stones of Florence.

Carlo was for going off instantly to the house where his Giulia was immured under such cruel circumstances, and it was with no little difficulty that the fattore was able to keep him from doing so. But such a course of action would have upset all Signor Domenico’s purposes and calculations. He knew very well that Carlo Sparti’s appearance at his sister’s house would have been told to Signora Olivia, in the Casentino, as quickly as the post could carry the news—and that would have by no means suited his plans. Nor did he wish

Carlo to show himself at Marrolo just yet. His purpose was to return himself immediately, and to leave Carlo in Florence, under the express promise that he would not make any attempt to see Giulia for the next three or four days. At the end of that time, Signor Domenico held out the hope to him that he might claim his Giulia before the eyes of all the world, and take her back with him to the Casentino as his own.

For the *fattore* had now all his arms ready for such a meeting with his spiritual pastors and masters at Marrolo as he fully calculated would give him the victory, and serve to close Signora Olivia's mouth for at least some little space.

Carlo, of course, had to yield, and to give the promise required of him; and the *fattore's* good little Casentino nag, who at least had profited by the law's delay, if nobody else had, was, after his three days' rest, once more put to the light Tuscan *bagherino*, and Signor Domenico Rappi rattled away towards his home in the Casentino.

He did not, however, drive directly to his own homestead, but, to the considerable astonishment of his steed, turned him into the yard of a farmer of his acquaintance, which was situated some half-mile or so on the Florence side of his own home; and there requested that his horse might be put into the stable for an hour or so, as he had an errand to do before going home.

For it was an important part of the *fattore's* plan to have his intended interview with the Priore before facing the much more dreaded one with his liege lady at home.

Carefully taking, therefore, from the *cassetta* beneath the seat of the "*barrocino*" a small parcel enveloped in a silk handkerchief, which contained the recovered enamelled coffer, Signor Domenico turned his face toward the hill, and proceeded to climb to the terrace on which the church of Marrolo and the house of the Priore were situated. Arrived at the latter, he asked if he could speak for a few minutes with the Priore; and old Assunta, not a little surprised—for though a

visit from the *fattore's* wife was a very ordinary occurrence in her experience, one from the *fattore* himself was an almost unprecedented phenomenon—went into her master's sanctum with her message, and came back immediately, bidding the visitor to walk in.

### CHAPTER XIII.

SIGNOR DOMENICO was a little startled, but not at all displeased, at finding Don Neri Vampa, the vicar, in the Priore's study. Had the visitor been the Signora Olivia Rappi, doubtless the vicar would have been dismissed on her entrance into his superior's parlour. But in the case of the stout *fattore* it was otherwise. The magnificent Don Ignazio, ever stately and courteous, and perhaps a little more stately than usual, bowed to his visitor with grave politeness, and, motioning him to a chair, remained standing himself with his back to the fireplace, while he awaited the *fattore's* declaration of the object of his unusual visit. Don Neri remained standing awkwardly and sheepishly near the door.

What a contrast there was between the two ecclesiastics! It was difficult to imagine that they were both individuals of the same profession, and that a profession which above all others presupposes the intrinsic and essential equality of its members. The Priore has been already described. On the present occasion, as he stood somewhat haughtily drawn up to his full height, with the fingers of his left hand thrust into the opening between the buttons on the breast of his glossy and spotless cassock, his handsome head thrown a little back, and one shapely foot and leg, clad the one in its neat thin shoe with silver buckle, and the other in its accurately-fitting black silk stocking, a little advanced, he lost none of the advantages of his specially commanding figure and dignified presence. He was the very beau-ideal of the presentment of a high-class Roman Catholic priest, of the type whose

thoughts, without ever ceasing to be wholly ecclesiastic, are yet busied far more with the things of this world than with those of a world to come.

Don Neri, the poor, underpaid vicar, whose position in the hierarchy must be understood to be closely analogous to that of curate in an Anglican parish, presented as typical an embodiment of a class of priests far more common in Tuscany, especially in the rural districts of it, than that of his superior. Of peasant birth, and very little superior in learning to the peasantry among whom he lived, and not at all in general culture or social bearing, his outward man was as little removed from the sordidness of an agricultural labourer as was compatible with a certain measure of indispensable compliance with the required costume of his order. He wore a cassock instead of a fustian jacket, but it was soiled, dirty, torn, weather-stained, and long since threadbare. From beneath this came two thick-ankled legs, in rusty black worsted stockings thrust into mud-soiled high-lows, much the worse for wear, and looking as if they had never known what it was to be cleaned since the day they were made. The inch-width of clerical linen collar around his neck, which ought to have been white, and which on the neck of his superior showed as spotless as snow, and as fine as a lady's cambric handkerchief, had become of the colour of mahogany from an indefinitely long period of uninterrupted service. The proper wide-leaved clerical hat he had given up as a bad job altogether; and held in his hand, in the place of it, an ordinary chimney-pot hat—or, rather, an extraordinary one, so brown, so battered, so napless, so greasy was it. It was very narrow in the brim and high in the crown, of a form that might have been supposed to have been purposely selected as that most adapted to impart a thoroughly mean and hang-dog expression to the visage it surmounted. This he held in his hand, as he stood humbly awaiting his superior's permission either to go or to stay, and kept assiduously wiping it round and round with a snuff-begrimed blue cotton handkerchief,



The Priore, it has been said, was and looked a priest of the class whose interests and thoughts centre in the things of this world. And some people would be inclined to say that such was but too likely to be the case with one so sleek, so prosperous, so evidently clad in fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day. But, at all events, the absence of these snares did not avail to insure spiritual-mindedness on the part of the poor vicar. He was a wretched, hungry-looking creature of the strongly-pronounced weasel-faced type; as mean a physiognomy as the human face divine was ever degraded to. As he stood in an attitude which suggested the idea of a lowly bow arrested when half-way toward its completion, and there frozen into permanence, his eyes professed to be turned toward his magnificent superior; but any one who had watched them might have observed that they ever and anon strayed with a furtive, suspicious, uneasy glance from under their brows to the bluff fattore. There was a shade of manner in the bearing of Signor Domenico which a little perplexed and surprised both priests. It would give a very mistaken idea of this *nuance* of manner if it were described as aggressive or bullying, or in any degree approaching to insolence. But there was a sort of expression of cool and comfortable confidence about it that was by no means lost on either of the members of that profession which makes it so large a part of its business to spy the movements of the heart beneath the outside appearances that are assumed for the purpose of concealing them. It was strange that Signor Rappi should seek voluntarily the presence of his spiritual pastors; stranger still that, being in the presence of the Priore, he should manifest no desire to get away with the expenditure of a few deferentially courteous words, as unmeaning and as brief as they could be made. What could have brought the man there? The Priore doubted not that it was something connected with the arrest of young Sparti; probably a petition that he, Don Ignazio, would use his influence to procure his pardon and release, which might possibly be accorded—when the position

of affairs in the *fattore's* family should be such as no longer to make his detention expedient. As for Don Neri, it may well have been that the vulpine astuteness which with him stood in the place of conscience and of imagination suggested the possibility of many disagreeable causes that might have reference to the *fattore's* visit.

The Priore was the first to speak.

"Good evening, Signor Domenico." (This is universally the salutation in the country as soon as the hour of noon has passed.) "We have admirable weather for the country. You have recently made a visit to Florence, I think?"

"Yes, your Reverence; just returned. Indeed, I have not been home yet; for I had a little matter of business to speak with your Reverence on, which I thought might as well be settled before—well, before seeing my wife—a good woman, Signor Priore, an excellent woman; but—you know."

"If all my parishioners were like the Signora Olivia Rappi, Marrolo would be a much better place than it is, Signor Domenico," returned the priest, with marked significance. "May I ask," he added, with a slight degree of severity in his tone, whether you would prefer that our friend Don Neri should withdraw while you speak with me?"

"Not at all so, your Reverence. By no means. My business will detain you for a very short time; it will be settled in no time—in the twinkling of an eye. And, then, the fact is that what I have got to say in some degree concerns Don Neri," replied the *fattore*, in an unconstrained, cheery voice, that brought a slight frown to the brow of the Priore.

He answered only by a stiff and haughty bend of his head.

"I want your Reverence," pursued the *fattore*, bluntly, as he took the parcel, wrapped in its silk handkerchief, that contained the precious coffer, from under his arm—"I want your Reverence to be so good as to look at something that I have got here."

"Humph! a present to conciliate my good-will. I wonder what the fool has brought me. He might have known me

better, I should have imagined," thought the Priore to himself. But he said nothing in reply, only again bending his head gravely.

"Did your Reverence ever see *that* before?" asked Signor Domenico, taking the coffer from its covering, and holding it up before the priest's eyes. "No—don't be in a hurry!—Then *you* have seen it before, any way," he said, quickly stepping between Don Neri and the door, toward which the vicar had turned very hastily the moment his eye had caught sight of the article that emerged from under the fattore's handkerchief.

"What is the meaning of this?" said the Priore, now frowning heavily. "That coffer belongs to the treasury of my church of Marrolo. Of course I have seen it, though it is a good many years, I think, since I have done so. Who has dared to remove it from the church? This is a very serious matter, Signor Domenico Rappi. It will be well if it does not turn out to be a question of sacrilege."

"Quite so! just so! your Reverence. This coffer belongs, and always has belonged, to the parish church and the parishioners of Marrolo," said the fattore, giving a special emphasis to the latter words, in reply to the somewhat marked intonation with which the Priore had pronounced the "my" in asserting that the coffer belonged to the church.

"And how comes it in your possession, pray?" asked the Priore, throwing up his head angrily.

"That is just what I was going to tell your Reverence. I found this coffer in the shop of a dealer in such matters, on the Ponte Vecchio at Florence. I recognized it, and thought it my duty to bring it back to Marrolo. No—*don't* go!" added the fattore, again intercepting Don Neri, who made a second and more determined attempt to get to the door.

"I ask again," said the Priore, looking this time severely at the cowering figure of the unhappy vicar, "what is the meaning of this? And I ask it now of you, Signor Vicario. There must have been, I am afraid, gross negligence on

your part to have rendered possible the abstraction of this coffer from the treasury of the church."

"Oh, no, your Reverence—no negligence at all. Don Neri knew very well what he was about when he carried off this coffer and sold it to that old rogue of a silversmith and money-lender on the Ponte Vecchio," said the *fattore* drily.

"Heavens and earth, Signor Rappi! Do you know what you are saying? What! charge *my* vicar with robbing the parish church! Have you reflected on the consequences of making such an accusation without the most ample and undeniable means of substantiating it?" said the Priore, in his most stately and magnificent manner.

"No, your Reverence. I have not thought of that at all, because I *have* the means of making good what I have said. Bless your heart, there is no mistake about it. Old Gino Sartori has confessed the whole thing. The vicar here stole the coffer out of the church, and sold it to Signor Sartori. That's the long and the short of it."

But before the *fattore* had come to the end of this speech, the miserable vicar, dropping his wretched old hat on the floor, had sunk upon his knees, and, bowing his head on his breast, held up his clasped hands in mute supplication.

The Priore stood for a minute or two looking from one to the other of the two men before him, and apparently undecided what to do or say. Then, with a rapid, half-contemptuous, half-menacing gesture of his hand, he bade the trembling culprit rise from his knees and go into the next room, and wait there till he should be called.

"You have acted wisely and with discretion, Signor Rappi," continued he, as soon as the vicar had slunk to the door, and had closed it behind him—"wisely and with discretion, in coming directly to me, before speaking of this very painful matter to any other person. Marrolo owes to your zeal and—and—patriotism the recovery of a valuable piece of property, and I shall take care that your merits are known and appreciated. I shall also take care that the grievous

faults into which the temptation of a little money has led the man who has just left us shall be duly punished and atoned for. But it would not be for the advantage of the Church or of our parish that there should be occasion for scandal. Your wisdom in communicating the matter to me before speaking of it to anybody in the village shows me that you agree with me in this. It will be well that nothing should be said about the matter in the village—or elsewhere. The coffer shall be replaced in the church, and shall be exhibited on the altar next Sunday. That will be our wisest plan, will it not ? ” said the Priore, in a condescending and conciliatory manner.

“ I dare say it will, your Reverence. I thought perhaps that you might not like that the vicar should be tried for robbery and sent to the galleys. It would not look well for the Church, would it now ? And that is why I came straight to you, before speaking a word about it to anybody, so that it might all be settled quiet and comfortable between you and me, you see—if we could come to understand each other.”

“ How understand each other ? It seems to me, my good friend, that we have understood each other very well. I tell you, Signor Domenico, that I think you have acted with great wisdom and discretion in the matter,” said the Priore, looking doubtfully at his companion.

“ Thank you, Signor Priore,” said Signor Domenico, with a bow ; “ I don’t think that we quite understand each other yet. But I’m not afraid that it will be difficult for us to do so. You see, we both want something. *You* want, of course, that this business should be kept quiet, and no scandal made about it. Quite right, too. But *I* want something else.” And the *fattore* paused and looked straight into the priest’s face, with a steady but perfectly good-humoured expression.

A cloud gathered on the Priore’s lofty brow, and it was evident that it was not without an effort of self-constraint that he replied, coldly, but still civilly,—

“ Signor Domenico Rappi has no need to be told that I am

now, as at all times, more than ready to do anything in my power for the welfare of his family—or himself.”

“Too much honour, Signor Priore ! I know it—I know it ! But you see what I want is what *I* think good for the welfare of my family, not what anybody else thinks so. It might be different, you know. Now, for instance, to make a long story short, I want to give my girl Giulia to the young fellow that loves her, and that she has set her heart on—young Carlo Sparti. He is a good and well-to-do young chap enough. And, bless your heart, your Reverence, if you will excuse me for mentioning it, it is no manner of use trying to make a girl take a fancy to a young fellow because he goes regular to confession and never misses mass. If you’ll believe me, that’s not what will make a girl fond of a chap—not a bit of it; nor all the preaching in the world won’t do it. Now there’s Giulia—she won’t so much as look at Simone Bossi. It is just sending him on a fool’s errand to bid him look after her. It is, indeed, your Reverence.”

And the worthy fattore paused and scratched his head.

The brow of the Priore had been lowering more and more heavily and threateningly as Signor Rappi’s address proceeded. Evidently the words would have come fast and hot enough, if he had chosen to give way to his emotions, but he did not choose to do so. And he remained for some seconds looking scowlingly at the fattore in silence. At last he spoke, slowly and without any appearance of temper.

“And what, my dear sir, would you wish *me* to do in this matter ? If the young man and the young woman are determined to set at naught the wishes and advice of their natural advisers and directors, what part or hand can *I* have in the matter ? ”

“Why, your Reverence, saving your presence, it is as plain as a pikestaff. There’s la Signora Rappi at home there—a good woman, your Reverence, a *very* good woman—but—whereas,” continued the fattore, proceeding with his argument as if the thoughts that were in his own mind had

been uttered—"whereas if you were to say the word, you know, your Reverence, the thing would be all right and straight in a minute."

"You wish me to tell your wife that, in my opinion, she had better refuse her daughter to the pious and dutiful son of the Church, whom I have consistently recommended to her favourable consideration, and give her to a young man whom I have always advised her to shut her door to?" said the priest, looking hard at Signor Domenico.

"Yes, just that," replied the *fattore*, boldly, to the no small surprise of the priest; "that is it—that is just what is wanted."

"And what reason, pray, would you suggest that I should assign for such a change of opinion and advice?" rejoined the Priore, with something very like a sneer in his voice.

"Reason!" cried the *fattore*, with a genuineness of surprise that was amusing in its *naïveté*—"Reason! why, your Reverence would never think of giving a woman any reasons—and your Reverence the parish priest, too! Surely, that is not the way the gentlemen of your cloth talk to the women! Says you, 'I have changed my mind,' and that's all about it. Does your Reverence think that my wife would dream of asking the parish priest for reasons, if he was to tell her black was white, and white black again, a dozen times in an hour? Not she. You say you choose to have it that way, and it will be all right."

"And what if I decline to alter my opinion on this subject?" said the Priore, scarcely able to prevent a smile from stealing over his face, the result of a complacent consciousness of the truth of what the worthy farmer was saying.

"But your Reverence won't decline. It would be so disagreeable, and such a scandal to the Church, and give such a handle to them as are only too glad when the clergy get into trouble, if this matter of the Marrolo coffer were to be talked about. A priest—Don Ignazio Verini's vicar—sent to the galleys! Just think of all the newspapers would say!

Surely, your Reverence, we had better just settle it quietly between you and me."

Again the Priore was silent for a short time. Yes, it was but too clear that the *fattore* had the whip-hand of him. Assuredly it was not to be thought of that the act of which this wretched vicar had been guilty should be noised abroad from the house-tops, and made into a theme for railing at the Church and bringing discredit upon her ministers. *His* vicar, too! Not to be thought of for a moment! He was not hesitating. He knew that he must accept the *fattore's* terms. But the position was so new to him—it was something so unprecedented for him to find himself face to face with one of his own parishioners, receiving instead of dictating conditions—that it needed a few minutes of struggle to enable him to accept it. He gave a moment of rapid and masterly consideration to the bearing of all the circumstances of the case on each other, to see whether it might be possible in any way to turn the tables on Signor Domenico. But he could see no loop-hole of escape. The matter was too clear and simple, and the proofs too many and too easily appealed to. There was nothing for it but to surrender at discretion.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

"PERHAPS, on the whole, it would be best for the interests of the parish and of religion if—the Signorina Giulia and this young Sparti were to make a match of it," said the Priore at last, with a sort of gulp, which he could not quite succeed in suppressing.

"No doubt of it, your Reverence," said the *fattore*, with just the slightest gleam of a twinkle in his eye. "Not a doubt of it. It will be best for—all parties."

"But the young man is at the present moment in prison, is he not?" asked the Priore.

"Not a bit of it, your Reverence. *I* caught the deserter—



Paolo Torre his name is. I delivered him up in Florence safe enough. Carlo was soon shown to be innocent of all complicity in his escape, and was let out of prison yesterday."

"Humph! you seem to have been pretty active, Signor Domenico. And is the young man at Marrolo now?"

"No, your Reverence, he is at Florence, where I left him. I would not let him come back to Marrolo till I had seen how your Reverence would see fit to settle all these matters."

"That was very discreetly done, Signor Domenico. Your daughter Giulia is also in Florence, I believe?"

"Yes, your Reverence; but I have forbidden Carlo to see her till I knew what your Reverence would decide in the matter. I would not act in the business without your Reverence, you know."

"Truly, you have shown your discretion at all points, my good Domenico. And what do you propose that the young folks should do now?"

"Well, your Reverence, you see—there are some reasons that make me think it better, perhaps, that the marriage should take place in Florence, and then Sparti could bring his wife home to his own house. You see there might be less trouble—from jealousy, you know—or anything of that sort. I thought that if your Reverence would say a word to my wife, she might go back with me to Florence, and then all return together when the marriage was over. And then, when we were gone, perhaps your Reverence might see well to say a word or two to my daughter Olivia, to let her know—just all about it."

"You think, then, of leaving for Florence with Signora Rappi, without informing the Signorina Olivia of the purpose of your journey?" asked the Priore, looking from under his eyebrows at the fattore.

"Well, yes, I think so, your Reverence. Perhaps it would—well—would come easier that way."

"Perhaps you are right. Perhaps it would be for the best," said the Priore thoughtfully, as he remembered the

glance he had seen in Olivia's eyes when he had so coolly communicated to her his change of plans as regarded her.

And so, after a few more words, it was settled that Signor Rappi, on going home, should carry with him a note from the priest, requesting the Signora Rappi to step up to the rectory-house that evening.

And then, the *fattore* having taken his leave, and proceeded on his way down the hill to his own house, there came a *mauvais quart d'heure* for the unhappy vicar.

The Signora Rappi was a good deal surprised—not at receiving a message from the Priore, requesting her to step up to his house for the purpose of having a little conversation with her “spiritual pastor and master”—but at receiving the missive from the hands of her husband. The *fattore*, however, tossed the note to her, as he came in, saying that “that had been brought for her from the Priore,” leaving her to imagine, if she chose, that he had taken it from the hand of some other messenger. Signor Domenico desired that some supper should be got for him, merely saying, in a careless manner, that he should be obliged to return to Florence on the following morning, and that he would tell his wife what he was going for at leisure, when she returned from her visit to the Priore. In reply to his inquiries for his elder daughter, he was told that Olivia had been complaining of a bad headache, and had gone to her own room. So, while his wife got ready for her visit, the servant brought the *fattore* his supper, and he sat down to it in solitude—and made none the worse meal on that account.

Olivia's plea of headache as a reason for shutting herself up in her own room was no mere excuse. Her head, in truth, ached violently enough; but that was but one manifestation of the universal fever of the blood produced by the terrible and crushing heart-ache, which at one moment seemed to benumb her into a half-comatose state of dead despair, and in the next to wake into raging activity all the furies of jealousy, hatred, and burning desire for revenge. She was

not lying down on the bed, but sitting on the foot of it, staring, with dry eyes and burning eyeballs, at the opposite whitewashed wall. An ostentatiously large crucifix was suspended at her back over the head of the bed. But of all the mixed and jostling feelings in her mind, not one prompted her to turn in *that* direction for comfort and consolation. And truly, if any eye could have watched the unhappy girl, as she sat immovable, save that from time to time she rocked herself backward and forward on her seat, as if from bodily anguish, the observer would have detected small trace, on the exquisitely lovely features, of the Madonna-like calm and sanctity of expression for which Olivia was celebrated. Her long hair of glossy black was falling down on either side of the dead-white face, and over her faultlessly-shaped shoulders; and her hands—long, slender, and bloodless—were pressed on either side of her throbbing temples, save when, every now and then, as a fiercer gleam of uncontrolled fury flashed from her eyes, the arms would be extended into the air, while the fingers worked nervously, clasping and unclasping themselves in a manner suggesting that the thoughts within, which prompted their working, were such as to make the blood run cold to think of. It is an old remark, that those temperaments which are the calmest and most impassible under ordinary circumstances, are subject to the most irrepressible and dangerous outbreaks of violence when a tempest-wind of sufficient force to stir them does arise. And Olivia exemplified the truth of the observation in the most striking manner.

And that priest! A clever man, an experienced man, one whose business it was to know the hearts of men, and more especially of women, and who fancied he knew them so well. What did he really know of the emotions which sway with most terrible mastery the female heart? What did he dream of those depths of passion which he had never fathomed, and which, like some deep, sleeping pool, had lain still and quiescent under the surface appearance of a placidly

smooth oval face, and the routine practice of devotional formalities? Less than any other man, who was not a priest, would have known. Surely less, or he would never have dreamed for an instant that even the Madonna-faced Olivia could have tolerated the dispensations to which he expected her to be docile, as if confessions and fasts and litanies had really purged all human passion out of her. A blind leader of the blind in truth!

If the priest could have seen her as she sat there in her great agony on the foot of her bed, with her back turned to the crucifix, it may be doubted whether he would have ventured on attempting to play with her the game he had planned.

With her mother, la Signora Rappi, the case was different. In the first place, mothers of fifty can look more philosophically at such matters than daughters of twenty; and, in the second place, the passions, hopes, and pride that were to be crushed and abased, were not hers, but another's—which makes resignation and reliance upon religion easier. Signora Rappi heard the priest's behests with no little surprise, but with no attempt at resistance or remonstrance. In her own heart she had serious and very disagreeable misgivings as to the effect this change in the dispensations of Providence might produce on her elder daughter; though she did not venture to manifest them. And when the Priore intimated that perhaps it would be for the best that she should accompany her husband on his intended journey to Florence on the morrow, without making any communication to her daughter upon the subject on which he had been speaking to her, it was with no little sense of relief that she acquiesced in this arrangement, and with a very sincere feeling of gratitude that she accepted the Priore's offer to take upon himself the task of communicating to Olivia the decision which had been come to with regard to the family affair during her absence in Florence. "It will be lonely and dull enough for Olivia all by herself in the farm-house, when they are all gone," thought the Priore to himself; "and it will be just the oppor-

tunity, disgusted as she is, too, with the loss of her lover, to direct her mind and reconcile it to a cloistered life."

So all was settled quite smoothly. Signora Rappi found her husband sitting on the bench before the door, smoking his cigar after supper, when she came back from the Priore's house.

"His Reverence tells me," she said, "that he thinks it will be best for me to go with you to-morrow to Florence, 'Menico. I hope it will all turn out for the best. Who'd have thought that Giulia would be married, after all, before her sister? I only hope, for my part, that Olivia won't take on about it."

"You and the Priore and Olivia put your heads together to make a match for her, and my little Giulia and I have managed *her* affairs. I hope Olivia's will turn out as well. I will go and see that Nerone has got his supper (Nerone was the little Casentino pony that drew the *fattore's* *bagherino*), for we must be off by five o'clock in the morning."

Not much passed between the *fattore* and his wife on their journey. The Signora Olivia, to her husband's considerable surprise and very great comfort, did not seize the opportunity for lecturing and preaching at her husband, as it was her usual habit to put to profit those rare occasions when she got within ear-shot of the *fattore* without the possibility of his getting away from her. The fact was that she did not see her way plainly before her. She was mystified. It seemed as if there were an intelligence of some sort between her husband and the Priore, which was so unprecedented and extraordinary a circumstance that it deranged the bearing of all the points of the Signora Rappi's compass, and made her feel as if she were not sure that she should be sailing in the right direction by bullying Signor Domenico as usual.

It is not necessary to follow the worthy couple filling the *bagherino* so handsomely on their journey, nor to recount all the lover's raptures of Carlo, or the delight of Giulia at such a sudden and brilliant sunrise after the black and miserable night she had been passing in her aunt's house, or the

exceeding surprise and disappointment of the latter lady when she learned the turn affairs had taken. Of course it must be supposed that such a man as Don Ignazio Verini must know best, and must be right; and her own confessor assured her that she might depend upon it that such was the case, and that the Priore had some sufficiently good reason for changing his plans; but it was very surprising, and had a disagreeable flavour about it of the young lady, whom she had been coercing so conscientiously, getting her own way at last.

Suffice it that all went "merry as a marriage-bell"; that the necessary preliminaries were very speedily arranged; and that on the fourth day from the fattore's last departure from Marrolo the party set out on their return thither—Signor Domenico and his wife in one bagherino, and Carlo driving his bride in another following it.

## CHAPTER XV.

DON IGNAZIO knew that the fattore and his party might be expected to return to Marrolo on the evening of the fourth day from that of his departure for the capital. And he was very far from unmindful of the task he had undertaken with regard to the Signorina Olivia. But it was not his plan to set about fulfilling his mission immediately. It is not to be for a moment imagined that he deferred the task because he was afraid, or had any misgivings or even reluctance to execute it. It is true that he had seen enough at his last interview with the Signorina Olivia to have become aware that there might be more difficulty than he had at first imagined in bending her will to the fate to which he destined her. But a practised horsebreaker has no more idea of fearing the colt he has to break, however the animal may kick and plunge at first, or doubting of his own ultimate success, than the Priore had of either dreading or thinking very seriously

of the business before him. But it was not his purpose to set about it immediately, because he considered that Olivia's life in the solitary farm-house, alone with her anger and disappointment, would have an excellent effect in preparing her to accept the destiny to which he proposed to urge her. Utter weariness of the life on the outside is often the most potent of the influences which dispose "brides of Christ" to seek the tomb-like repose of the inside of the cloister wall.

So Don Ignazio allowed the first and the second day to pass by, before taking any step toward the execution of his task. It was his purpose to go down to the farm-house on the third day. But, as fortune would have it, very early on the morning of the third day, a man and horse arrived at the door of the Priory with a message to the effect that the "curato" of a village some eight or ten miles off was supposed to be dying, and that the dying man was most anxious to see the Priore of Marrolo. It was impossible to refuse to attend this summons; and the Priore, reflecting that *fattore Rappi* would not get back to Marrolo till the evening of the subsequent day, and that he should have all the morning for the execution of the commission he had charged himself with, thus put off going to see Olivia till the fourth day.

He was detained at Repafratta, the name of the village to which he had been called, the whole of that day and far into the night, not being able to get back to Marrolo till near midnight. He was up betimes the next morning, and proposed going down to Signor Rappi's farm-house on his errand as soon as he should have performed his morning mass.

Now all this delay, intentional and unintentional, was very unfortunate for Olivia Rappi. She had been left, as it will be remembered, by the Priore, in his last conversation with her, under the impression that Simone Bossi, who was, as she had been led to believe, her lover, and had for months frequented her father's house as such, was about to marry her sister Giulia; and nothing had been said previous to the departure of her father and mother for Florence to correct

this impression. The mistake was a very terrible one for Olivia. It might have been distasteful to her that Giulia's marriage with the man whose love-making to her sister she had so often snubbed and thwarted should take place, while her own marriage with her authorized and recognized lover was still unsettled. But that would have been as nothing compared with the agony of fury and jealousy that was tearing her. Her lover had been false to her—hideously, beyond all possibility of forgiveness, false to her—for he had been nourishing a passion for Giulia even while he was pretending to be striving to win her love. He had been making her a mere stalking-horse—using the opportunities afforded him by the cruel treachery he was practising against her to make love to her younger sister. (That this was not *altogether* the case, the reader knows ; but it necessarily seemed so to the unfortunate Olivia.) But not even this misery was all that was driving her to despair. Not only her supposed lover, but everybody else had been false to her—had conspired against her, and combined to make a dupe and fool of her. That false, wicked priest, too ! to whom she had for more years than she could remember been taught to look up to as the very representative of God upon earth. Religion !—it sickened her to think what a poor, cheated dupe she had been made in the name of religion. It was all a cheat and a lie ! Everything was a lie ! There was no truth anywhere in the world ! Look at the contrasted fates of her sister and herself ! She had walked in the paths that had been pointed out to her—Giulia had rebelled. Look at the result ! She had been fooled to the top of her bent—taught to believe that she was one of the elect. Yes ; elected to bear all the misery, while others were to gather the rewards. Religion ! The very thought of the Priore, and his soft words and his praises, sickened her. She hated and loathed the whole thing. She hated the false, false world, and the golden sunlight that smiled down upon it all with a loathsome mockery.



During the three days in which the Priore had, partly by calculation and partly by accident, left her to herself, Olivia could hardly be said to have slept—hardly be said to have taken sustenance. She had, during a few hours at a time, been in a semi-unconscious state, but it was not restorative, health-giving sleep. She had from time to time, when the parched sensation in her throat became intolerable, swallowed a little milk, but that was all the nourishment she had taken. She had hid herself away in her room, shutting out the odious sunlight of the three brilliant days that had passed, and feeling from hour to hour as if she was approaching nearer and nearer to the faint line which separates such misery as hers from absolute raving madness.

The fourth day was of a different kind. The wind had changed; a strong “greco,” or south-east wind, was blowing; the whole sky was black with heavy clouds, and threatened a deluge of rain. The change was welcome to Olivia. The brilliant sunshine had seemed to insult her misery. The lowering sky appeared congenial to her condition of mind. An irresistible feeling of restlessness seized her, and she thought she would go out.

It was about the hour of the “Angelus”—noonday, that is to say—and the Priore had settled in his mind to go down to the farm-house immediately after the meal which it was his custom to take at that hour. It was a favourable time for Olivia to leave the house without being seen, and without the consequent necessity of speaking to anybody. The servant, who performed such part of the work of Signora Rappi’s house as she did not attend to herself, was eating her own dinner, and giving theirs to the men who worked in the yard; while such as did not live in the house had, according to the invariable Tuscan custom, retired into some stable or out-house to pass the two hours’ cessation from work allotted at mid-day in sleep or chat. Olivia was, therefore, enabled to slip from the house unobserved; and turning, without any thought or knowledge whither she was going, into the gate-

way of a field that happened to stand open on the left hand of the country lane into which the entrance to Signor Domenico's farm-yard opened, she dreamily crossed the field in the direction of the bottom of the valley. There was no path through the field, and nothing to make it appear probable that any one should pass that way. At the farther side of this field was the Arno, a very small rivulet in this early part of its course; and along the bank of it, artificially raised into a causeway (for even here the infant river can occasionally do mischief when swollen by sudden and violent rains), there is a path, which, in the direction up the stream, runs along the river's bank for two or three miles, till it is brought to a sudden ending by another little stream, which, coming down from the hills on the left hand, here falls into the Arno. Once upon a time, Heaven knows how many years ago, there was a bridge over this little stream, making it possible to continue one's walk along the path by the side of the Arno. But the little stream, puny little trickle as it was in dry weather, like most Tuscan streams, little or big, was capable of playing all sorts of mischievous pranks at a very short notice after a heavy rain-fall. And on some occasion, more years ago than Olivia could remember, the wilful little stream had, in such a fit of sudden rage, thrown down and carried away the bridge. Elsewhere it would have been built up again within the next week, but in Tuscany nothing of the sort was thought of. It was left to remain as the angry waters and the Madonna (probably also angry) had left it; and the peasants quietly took to calling the spot "Ponte Rotto"—broken bridge—just as if that were, and always had been, and always must be, the proper name of the locality.

Along this path, which ended as has been described, and thus in its truncated condition led nowhither, Olivia sauntered on, utterly unconscious of all external things—conscious only of her own utter misery and despair.

Meanwhile the Priore was walking leisurely down the hill

after his good dinner, on his way to the farm-house, meditating as he went on the best way of setting about the business in hand. He had not yet, in the course of the three previous days, thought much about it. There did not seem to him difficulty enough in the matter to require much preparation. On his way to the scene of action, he tranquilly considered, as he walked, what would be the best and readiest means of bringing his docile and pious parishioner's mind into the condition he wished it. Thus tranquilly pursuing his way, with the deliberate and somewhat stately step of a dignified ecclesiastic after dinner, the Priore reached *fattore Rappi's* farm much about the time when, at the end of the two hours' mid-day repose, the labourers were returning to their work, and the rustic world began to be alive again, after its classic period of suspension of all active existence. Arriving at the open door, he walked in, and, well knowing the localities of the house, proceeded to the kitchen, and there asked the servant to tell the Signorina Olivia that he wished to speak with her. The woman went on her errand, and quickly returned, looking surprised, but not in the least degree alarmed, with the answer that the Signorina Olivia was not in her room; and she supposed that she must have gone out for a walk, though it seemed odd that, not having been out once during the last three fine days, she should have gone out now, when, to all appearances, they were going to have a storm shortly. It struck the Priore as odd, too; and some sort of feeling caused a cloud to overshadow his brow as he heard the answer to his request. Perhaps it was only that he was annoyed at having to lose his time; for it was absolutely necessary that he should speak with the girl before the return of her parents, according to his promise, and he could hardly go back up the hill again to his house without seeing her, especially as it now wanted only about three or four hours of the time when the *fattore* and his companions might be expected to arrive on their return. The servant remarked that it was even then

beginning to rain, and doubtless, therefore, her young mistress would return shortly to the house. Did she know, the priest asked, in which direction she had gone? No! she had not seen her—had not heard her speak of any intention of going out. The Priore told her to go and ask the men in the yard if they could tell at all in which direction the Signorina had walked. No; they had none of them seen her, and had no idea which way she had gone.

The Priore said that he would wait for her return, and was shown into the fattore's sitting-room for that purpose.

The Priore waited for more than half an hour, going from time to time to the window to look out at the rain, which was now descending in torrents. He became more and more surprised, as the minutes went on, that the young lady did not return; and gradually a certain vague uneasiness began to steal over him. At last, when the clock in the fattore's parlour, at which the Priore had been glancing from time to time, pointed to three, he went out into the kitchen, and told the maid that it seemed to him very strange that the Signorina had not long since returned; and that, seeing that the storm of rain continued as violent as ever, it seemed to him that it would be well to send the men about the place to look for her. A Tuscan is always ready to accept any commission or job of any kind which has the effect of taking him away from the regular work on which he is employed; and the men undertook readily enough to start off in search of their young mistress. But the question was, which way to go. There were three men disposable; and it was settled, after losing half an hour in debating the question, in true Italian fashion, that one of these go up the hill through the village toward the church, while another followed the road leading down the valley, and the third took that up the valley, which is the way to Florence. If the description of the locality at the beginning of this chapter were sufficiently clear to enable the reader to understand it, he will have perceived that neither of these searchers could by any chance fall in with

Olivia. The last of the three, indeed, went in the same direction in which she was wandering when last we saw her. But he was following the road, while she was walking on the path by the side of the river, which was separated from the road by the space of two or three fields. Besides, Olivia's path, as we know, did not extend beyond two or three miles, being brought to an abrupt termination by the ruined bridge. Thus the man who had been sent in that direction had soon passed the spot at which her path had come to an end—and her walk with it. For there, by the side of the little rivulet, now rapidly becoming a dangerous torrent, she sat down regardless, and indeed unconscious, of the rain, which was falling in torrents; and there she remained, gazing with a sort of stupefied fascination at the raging and rising waters, observing them with the outward eye, but with all the inner sense wholly occupied by the more fiercely raging storm within her own breast.

At last the man who had gone up the hill came back. He had been all through the village. He had inquired everywhere; he could hear no tidings of the missing young lady. In fact, the villagers felt quite sure that she could not have passed up the village street without having been seen by some one, and that, in fact, she had not been there.

It was now past four o'clock; the other men had not returned; and the *fattore* might be expected to be home in an hour or so. The *Priore* was grievously perplexed. He could not prevent his mind from recalling a too vivid picture of the expression of Olivia's face, and of the look she gave him when she left him, after he had made that fatal communication to her. He was now seriously alarmed. And when it wanted only ten minutes to five, he decided on going out himself into the storm to look for her, rather because the uneasiness he felt made inaction and quiet waiting intolerable to him, than because he had any idea that he could do any better than those who were already seeking her.

The *Priore* turned from the door of the house in the

direction that Olivia had taken. So did the man who had been despatched along the road in that direction. But the latter, passing the open gate of the field into which Olivia had strayed, had thus missed all chance of finding her. The Priore, on the other hand, not in consequence of any reasoning upon the subject, and yet not quite by chance, as it is called, turned into the gate, and proceeded to cross the field towards the river, as Olivia had done before him. Not wholly by chance, though he, if he had asked himself the question, would have said that it was so. But, in truth, there was a half-recognised, vague dread in his mind, the looming shadow of a possibility, which he would by no means in words have admitted to be a possibility, that led him to direct his steps toward the river.

In the mean time the *fattore* and his wife, in one *bagherino*, and Carlo Sparti and his wife in another following it, were journeying homeward in far too happy and merry a frame of mind to care much for the deluge of rain that was falling on them. They had reached the inn at the *Consuma* before the rain began, and had there dined merrily. It was about an hour after they had started again that the rain began; they were then not much more than two hours from home; there was nothing for it but to push on at their best speed; and it wanted a good half-hour of six when the *bagherini*, amid much laughter and rivalry between the *fattore* and his son-in-law, came rattling down the last hill that brought them to the bottom of the valley, within a few miles of Marrolo.

They continued to dash along through the deluge of rain as fast as the good ponies could lay leg to ground, the two men shouting to their steeds and to each other, and the women laughing and chattering, till they were only about a couple of miles from home. There in the centre of the road stood one of the *fattore's* men, wildly waving his arms with the evident intention of stopping them. What in the world could he be there for in that storm of rain, and making frantic signs to them to stop—there close to home, and in such weather?

The two drivers pulled up their ponies—the older man not without a certain feeling of alarm, the younger surprised only, for his Giulia was here beside him, and it did not seem to him to matter much what could happen in all the rest of the world.

“Pietro! *che diavolo!* What on earth is the matter? Why don’t you speak, man?” cried the *fattore*.

“Oh, Signor Padrone! here’s the Priore—he wants to speak to you before you go any farther,” said the man.

“The Priore!—here!—in this weather? What in the world do you mean? Are you dreaming, or drunk? Where is the Priore?” said the farmer, with growing misgiving.

“Close by, Signor Padrone, at the gate leading into the field of Cecco Passini. Perhaps it would be better if you would get down from the *bagherino*, and just come and speak to him before you go any farther,” said the man, looking hard into the *fattore*’s face, as if to convey to him that there was more in what he was saying than he could then and there tell him.

“Well, this is the queerest go I ever heard of!” said the *fattore*, giving his wife the reins, and getting out of the *bagherino*. “I say, Sparti,” he added, “come you, too. I can’t understand what it means.”

The two men hurried forward, leaving the ponies and the women standing in the road under the pelting rain, and at a turn in the road, which had hid him from them, they saw the Priore standing at the side of the way.

“What—what is it? What is the matter?” said the *fattore*, with much alarm in his voice.

“My worthy Signor Domeni o, a misfortune has happened—a terrible misfortune. I wished to spare your wife till it can be told to her in a less terribly abrupt manner. Prepare yourself, my dear sir, for a painful shock!” said the priest.

“What is it? What has happened? Don’t keep me here, man, in suspense—speak out!” said the *fattore*, all his

usual deference for the Priore breaking down under his anxiety.

"A terrible accident has happened to your daughter Olivia. She has fallen into the river, and—" The Priore supplied the remainder of his sentence by looking with sad and sympathizing eyes into the fattore's face, and slowly shaking his head.

"Not dead! You don't mean to say that my child is drowned!" cried the poor fattore, staring at him with open-eyed horror.

"It is even so, my poor Signor Domenico. There was no hand near to help her. She had gone out before the storm commenced—perhaps intending to meet you on your return—who knows? She seems to have taken the path along the bank of the river. Perhaps she was unaware of the bridge over the Strina torrent being broken. Perhaps she attempted to cross it. It was there, at all events, that we found her body, in the deep pool made by the fall of the torrent into the river. Peace be with her soul!"

The fattore wrung his hands and stood speechless, as if stricken dumb by the suddenness of the blow.

"Who is to tell this to her mother?" he said at length, in a hoarse voice.

Carlo Sparti had meanwhile gone on a few steps to a group of labouring men, who were standing around and bending over the body of the luckless girl, which had been brought up from the spot where it had been found in the river to the roadside, as being the most convenient means of conveying it to the farm-house. He came back to the farmer, and, laying his hand affectionately on his shoulder, said, "Go back, father, to the women. I will see to conveying her to the house." And the fattore, though he had demanded, in the first agony of his grief, who was to take the duty of telling the lost girl's mother, simply obeyed the word of his son-in-law, and, still appearing more like a person walking in his sleep than one conscious of what he was doing, turned



to carry the tidings which had met him to the bereaved mother and sister.

There is little more to be added to this true story of priestly interference with the domestic arrangements of family life. The story is so far a remarkable one, and one which attracted much observation, and was widely talked of at the time, and is still remembered, as that it ended in the miserable death of one of the parties whose destiny the priest had undertaken to control. Natures as violent as that of the hapless Olivia are not met with every day, especially among the rural population of Italy. But as far as concerns the wide-spread misery which similar priestly manœuvrings frequently produce, the story has nothing very uncommon about it.

The *fattore* and his wife were spared the terrible addition to their sorrow which would have been occasioned by the knowledge that their child had perished by her own act. It might have been that she had fallen into the water, which in its swollen condition was abundantly sufficient to have destroyed her, if she had done so.

Did that magnificent specimen of the sacerdotal caste, Don Ignazio Verini, equally believe that his victim's death had been caused by accident? It may be shrewdly doubted. In any case, he never allowed the slightest word of misgiving upon the subject ever to pass his lips. Perhaps he may have been visited by some passing stings of remorse. But passing they are sure to have been—for had he not the consolation of knowing that he had done all for the "glory of God?"



THE GOLDEN BOOK OF TORCELLO.



## THE GOLDEN BOOK OF TORCELLO.

THOSE who, in visiting Venice, content themselves with seeing the recognized stock sights, passing up and down the Grand Canal in a gondola, and lounging—matchless lounge as it is—in the Piazza di San Marco ;—and they are nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand who thus content themselves—have seen but one-half, and that, if the most beautiful, not the most curious and characteristic half of Venice and of the life of its inhabitants. He who would form a conception of this rarely-seen other half must penetrate, and that on foot, the extraordinary labyrinth of narrow lanes which constitute the mass of the city. He will then find at every turn, and in the most unexpected corners, charming fragments of architecture—a richly arcaded window, an ornamented doorway, a picturesque stair, a sculptured column, or a beautiful arch—no longer, alas ! an archway—many of them with traditional bits of historic lore still clinging to them, and all attesting the wonderful amount of the ancient Venetian wealth and magnificence ;—the débris of palaces, which have in the days of the decline of the Adriatic's queen become in too many instances hovels, the abode of a poverty not many degrees removed from starvation ! But he will also find traits, which it requires perhaps habits of closer observation to appreciate, of the ways, ideas, and modes of life of a population which is to the present day more unchanged than perhaps in any other of the great cities of Italy. The special characteristics of the Venetian people were, probably in consequence of the intimate con-

nexion with the East which subsisted during all the centuries of the palmy days of Venice, more peculiar and more strongly marked than was the case in any city of the mainland. And the impress which the population received from its government, and from the circumstances among which it lived, was so profound and durable, that the Venetians in a thousand respects still possess a special idiosyncrasy of their own.

But such wanderings as I have recommended among the "calli," "rami," "fondamenta," "salizzade," and "campielli" of the city (the Venetians have a curiously strange nomenclature for the lanes, alleys, and courts which constitute their city, that is quite peculiar to themselves) will not suffice for the traveller who wishes to understand entirely the old life of Venice, such as the histories of the Republic from the fourth to the end of the eighteenth century describe it, and such as the memoirs, satires, and comedies of the last two of these centuries especially show it to us. Venice is garlanded, as many a poet has phrased it, with many a subject isle, scattered in the lagoon at different distances within a radius of some five or six miles around Saint Mark's, all of which were more or less important centres of population, and were ruled with a paternal despotism by the Doge and the dreaded "Ten." And the stranger bent on forming for himself a correct idea of the old Venetian life, such as it was up to and at the beginning of the present century, should not neglect to push the skimming of his gondola over the lagoon as far as the more interesting of these islets. Especially he should not omit to visit Torcello, the most important among them, politically, during many centuries, and the most interesting at the present day from the wonderfully picturesque as well as archæologically interesting remains of its utterly vanished prosperity, and from the strangely striking picture of desolation, which flouts the ruins of its pride, and preaches a more eloquent and poetical sermon on the old text, *Vanitas vanitatum*, than ever was heard from preacher's lips!

And these observations may serve as the introduction to a

story which I picked up in the course of ramblings such as those I have been recommending to the reader, and which seemed to me to illustrate vividly enough, if I can only succeed in telling it with the freshness with which it reached me, several of the aspects of Venetian life to which I have averted. It is a bit of family history, the present preservers of which are the grandchildren of two, and the children of two others, of the principal actors in it.

In a quiet little *campiello*, or court, reached only by a *sotto-portico* arched passage, which opened into one of the narrow lanes which form a perfect labyrinth in that part of the city between the church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli and the Rialto, lived, in the last year of the last century, an old man, who called himself a second-hand bookseller and picture-dealer. His name was Marco Zeno, and his family consisted of one son—at that time in his twentieth year—and of an old woman, by name Cate (which is Venetian short for Caterina), as a servant of all work. And few of the neighbours could recollect a time when old Zeno's family had been otherwise composed, for he had been for many years a widower. Had the commerce he professed to carry on depended on the exhibition of his wares to the public, it would hardly have been likely to flourish in the location he had chosen for it. In truth, the Campiello Sabion was as unpromising a place for "business" as could well be imagined. It was, as has been intimated, no thoroughfare, and could only be reached from an obscure lane, almost as silent and deserted as itself. It might be supposed that no foot, save that of some one of the dwellers in the little court, would ever have disturbed the perfect stillness of the place from one year's end to another. In some other respects, perhaps, the Campiello Sabion was not altogether unfitted for the purposes of the old bookseller. It was extremely quiet; more so than could have been the case in the heart of any other large city on the face of the earth. And this suited Signor Zeno, as he was a lover of books as well as a dealer in them, and a diligent vendor of

them. Moreover, the place was cleaner than neighbouring lanes—owing this privilege to its no-thoroughfare character and its abundant unoccupied space ; for though small, it appeared to be more than enough for all the needs of its inhabitants, few in number as they were, half the floors of the old houses seeming to be uninhabited ; affording convenient accommodation for the old pictures which Signor Zeno would occasionally expose to view there—either simply because they needed drying after a process of cleaning, or because he deemed it advisable to give them a treat to an amount of light which they never got inside his own doors. And then it was a quiet place, where the neighbours asked no questions, and troubled themselves not at all about any affairs save those connected with the keeping together of their own souls and bodies in as satisfactory a manner as might be.

It is probable that this last consideration was not the least influential in binding old Marco Zeno to the obscure habitation he had occupied so long. He was wont himself to assign more imaginative reasons for his attachment to the old house. He maintained it to be the identical house from which his namesake, Marco Polo, had gone forth to earn for Venice, by his wonderful and adventurous voyages, a never-to-be-forgotten share in the glories of those early navigators whose enterprise and daring opened new worlds to the knowledge and commerce of mediæval Europe. Tradition bears out Signor Zeno's assertion to the present day ; and if it be true that the house is the same, only in the sense in which the Highlander's knife, that had had many a new handle and many a new blade, was still the same knife—yet one feature of more unquestionable identity remained, and still remains to it, in its ancient and richly ornamented marble doorway, which was the pride of the old bookseller's heart. He was a man by no means unlikely to be influenced by such considerations, for he had the true antiquary's love for the past, and reverence for all its traces and remains. Nevertheless it



is probable that, as has been said, the other considerations which have been alluded to had their weight.

Old Marco Zeno was believed by all his neighbours, and indeed by all who knew him at all, to be a much richer man than any part of his outward seeming and manner of life would seem to indicate. The overt commerce which he carried on in the Campiello Sabion could hardly have furnished wherewithal to keep a family of mice in good condition. But neither the old man, or his son, or old Cate, ever seemed to want for anything. The old man and his old servant certainly did not indulge in any splendour of apparel; but Zuane (Venetian for Giovanni) his son used on festive days to sport a-toilette as smart as the smartest of his fellows: and if old Zeno was, as some said, a miser, he certainly did not push his miserliness to the length of denying himself or his household the comforts of life. But if the old bookseller was rich, where did he get his money? There were persons who said—and they were not the poor neighbours in the campiello, but people in a less humble position, who were more likely to have some knowledge of such matters—that Marco Zeno had made large gains in truth by picture-dealing; but not picture-dealing of any such overt kind as was carried on in the Campiello Sabion. Those were times in which such things were possible enough to persons combining sufficient knowledge of art and the commerce of it with the requisite amount of activity, courage, address, and cunning. All these were needed in no small degree for such operations as those which were suspected to have enriched old Marco Zeno. The French spoilers, who, after the ever-infamous extorted vote of the Senate, by which Napoleon, on the 12th of May, 1797, with unblushing perfidy put an end to the ancient republican government of Venice, entered the city with the purposes and intentions of common robbers, were of course very anxious to secure the entirety of the spoil to themselves. But where the spoil was so abundant, and distributed over every part of so large a city—where every one of the inhabitants

hated the spoiler with a truly Italian hatred, and deemed that any fate for their treasures was preferable to their falling into French hands—this was difficult to accomplish entirely. It was a great time for such operations as those which Marco Zeno was supposed to have been engaged in ; and more than one cautious, bold, and well-skilled speculator was known to have made considerable sums by the opportunities which the times offered. It suited old Zeno too, that such operations as those alluded to could often, from the circumstances of the case, ally themselves with schemes for defrauding the invader to the advantage of Venice, or at least of Venetians. For Marco Zeno was a Venetian to the heart's core. He was, as has been said, a diligent reader ; and all his reading was of the works that chronicled his country's greatness. He lived in the past ; and any one who could have heard his talk with the two or three old cronies who frequented his house in the evening might have supposed that the conversation was turning on the burning questions of the day, when, in fact, the question in debate was whether the noble equestrian statue of Bartholomew Colleoni (who died in 1488), which is now seen in the Piazza di Giovanni e Paolo, ought, or ought not, to have been placed by the Senate in the Piazza di San Marco in compliance with the terms of the deceased warrior's last will and testament, the ancient law, which forbade the erection of an incumbrance of any kind on the latter piazza, to the contrary notwithstanding.

These fragmentary outlines may suffice to enable the reader to complete for himself a tolerably accurate notion of the character and habits of the old bookseller. As to his exterior appearance, it will be sufficient to say that he would have been an admirable model to a painter engaged on a portrait of Shylock. Meanly clad in a long threadbare coat which nearly reached his heels, stooping much, not straightforwardly, but in a queerly twisted, lopsided fashion, with a physiognomy that must have been handsome in its day, high-nosed, hollow-cheeked, with an eye like an eagle's, an

abundance of long white locks, and an expression of shrewd intelligence unextinguishable by age, there was withal a something of nobility about the head, imparted to its expression doubtless by the nature of the old man's lifelong studies, and by the genuineness of his admiration and sympathy with all the great deeds of his beloved city.

And now I must endeavour, in as few words as may be, to give the reader some idea of Zuane Zeno, old Marco's only son, who was in his twentieth year, as has been said, in the last year of last century, when the events to be narrated took place, and who was, when I saw him at the time of my first visit to Venice, in truth the finest-looking old man I ever saw. And I was assured by one who was then still alive, and who doubtless remembered every lineament of feature and outline of form as only one person could remember them, that Zuane's match as a young man was not to be found in all Venice in those days—and much less, thought the speaker, in these. Let the reader picture Zuane to him—or her—self, standing on the poop of his gondola. Not that he was a gondolier, save on his own gondola, and when he was making her skim over the lagoon on his own business or pleasure, in a style that never another in Venice could emulate. Of all the athletic activities in which men may be seen engaged, there is no one at all comparable to the occupation of a gondolier for the exhibition of the person in an attitude at once graceful and picturesque, and calculated for the effective manifestation of energy and vigour in every muscle and limb. And Zuane Zeno on his gondola, leaning forward to the oar-stroke, his tall person and muscular figure shown to the best advantage by a costume consisting of a white jacket and trousers, with a red silk sash encircling the waist, was, in truth, a study for a sculptor. Probably, if a brisk breeze were blowing, his hat would be thrown aside, and ever and anon at the recovery of the oar he would toss back from his face the long, clustering chestnut locks that the wind made sport of, with an action that might have become an Apollo.

I spoke just now of Zuane's urging his *barca* over the lagoons on matters of business as well as of pleasure. And of late the business had been very serious and somewhat perilous business. Zuane, under his father's tuition, had inherited all the old man's love for Venice, and shared with him all the bitterness which the last two years had brought with them. Venetian patriots still love to maintain that, if on the 12th of May, 1797, the date of the fatal vote that put an end to the Venetian Republic, the timid and spiritless Senate had had energy and courage enough to throw the Frenchman's threats in his face, and, accepting the aid which the population of the provinces were eagerly offering—had determined on defending Venice—the day of her downfall might have been at least protracted. Few would be found to share that opinion at the present day, but it was at that time enthusiastically held by all the most generous of the youth of Venice and her territory. Enrolments were made, and eager offers poured in upon the Senate. But the effete old pantalons who composed that venerable body were only terrified by such propositions, and did their utmost to discourage and prevent them, in their dread that the ruthless enemy at their gates might be moved, by hearing of them, to scourge them with scorpions instead of with whips. Now Zuane Zeno had been one of the most active leaders of a movement for the collecting of a force that should offer to the Senate—and perhaps do somewhat more than offer—the means and the policy of resistance. It had all come to nothing, as so many other hopes and noble efforts did in those days. But Zuane had enthusiastically believed in it, and it had made the business of his life, during the time that preceded and immediately followed the infamous vote of the Senate. The Austrians entered Venice on the 18th of January, 1798, by virtue of the agreement of sale and barter, known as the treaty of Campo Formio, which made over the unhappy city from its tyrant conqueror to its new masters. And then the efforts which Zuane and others like him had been making were seen

to be hopeless ; and Zuane's "occupation," like Othello's, "was gone." As, by the force of contrast, a lesser suffering may be made to seem almost like a happiness in comparison with the more acute agony which preceded it ; so the Austrian occupation, odious as it was to Venice, was hailed as a relief from the far more detestable and grievous presence of the French. And the period which elapsed between the January of 1798 to the January of 1806, when Venice again fell into the hands of the French, as a consequence of the fresh hostilities between France and Austria, was one of comparative rest and tranquillity for Venice. It was, thus, mainly during the earlier months of 1797 that Zuane was making his own efforts to find the means of averting the ruin of his country, and during the latter months of the same year that his father was much more successfully engaged in cheating the conquerors, if cheating it could be called.

Old Marco Zeno had been a warm man, however, previously to the operations which were supposed to have so considerably enriched him. He had been so warm a man that Zuane had not been called upon to adopt any specific trade or calling as a means of earning his own living. Any of the neighbours in the Campiello Sabion would probably have assumed, as a matter of course, that Zuane was his father's assistant, and would be his successor in his business, such as it was. And perhaps Marco Zeno and his son would, if they had been questioned on the subject, have said the same thing. But, in truth, whatever old Marco's trade secrets may have been, Zuane shared none of them ; nor did the care of the business in the Campiello, such as it was, receive or need any assistance from him. What he *did* share with his father was the old man's readings and talkings over the old glories of Venice and his love for them ; and what his father did share with him, for the short period during which they lasted, was the young man's ardent hope that something might yet be done to avert the catastrophe which brought a State counting fourteen centuries of existence to so

shameful an ending. There was thus a very complete intelligence between them ; and if old Marco still strove to increase a store already more than sufficient for his needs, his object in that, as in all else, was to gratify his ambitious aspirations on behalf of a son of whom any father might well have been proud.

It was a stormy night towards the end of January, 1797 ; stormy, for a strong south wind was blowing the waters of the Adriatic, "restless" still, as when Horace so called it, against its northern shore, and driving them into the lagoons, till the surface of these was almost as rough as that of the sea outside the Lido ; but not uniformly dark, for the moon was near the full ; and though great masses of black clouds scudding across the sky towards the Friuli Alps made the night one of pitchy darkness, while the moon was behind them, the boisterous gale so tore and rent them, that ever and anon the full moonlight would suddenly shine out and illumine the whole extent of the lagoon and its numerous islets with its silvery and deceptive radiance.

And Zuane was bound that night for one of the more distant of these, the island of Torcello. In pursuing the objects which the reader wots of, Zuane had little to do with the mainland. The same efforts were being made there by other trusty hands. Zuane's special recruiting-ground was the islands of the lagoon. And it was perhaps the most promising for the purpose which all the territory of the Republic offered—not in point of the quantity but of the quality of the material to be found there. Though Venice had governed her subject isles with a high and sometimes with a somewhat heavy hand, the sparse population of these small dependencies was evidently Venetian and anti-French to a man. And they were a hardy, bold, adventurous race, with little to lose on the one hand save lives, which were too hard and joyless to be excessively cared for ; and on the other hand with all that ideal to save, which had gilded those hard lives with the pride of a glorious citizenship.

So Zuane was bound for Torcello that stormy night.

It was a night on which the best gondolier in Venice would not have cared to be on the lagoon, unless impelled by some very special motive—especially single-handed in a gondola. And Zuane was alone. It was not that he might not readily have found a companion to share his task; but he had his own reasons for choosing to be unaccompanied. Risk to life there was probably not much—for Zuane, like most of his fellows, could swim like a duck—but the risk of failure to accomplish the end in view was considerable; and that was almost worse to Zuane. And the exertion needed for the effort was very severe indeed.

It was nine o'clock when Zuane's gondola shot out into the lagoon from the narrow mouth of an obscure canal in the neighbourhood of the Sacco della Misericordia. Standing on the poop, oar in hand, clad not as he was described in a previous page, be sure, but in some dark-coloured material from head to foot, he had been lurking under the deep shadow of a bridge, while watching till the moon should be entirely obscured, and then in the utter darkness sent his boat, with three or four rapid and vigorous strokes, darting out into the open lagoon with the speed of a shot. There was not much danger that, on a night like that, he should be challenged by any officials of the effete government whose purposes he was thwarting. Nevertheless Zuane dreaded *that*, with a truly Venetian feeling of the omnipotence and omnipresence of "the Ten," much more than he feared the storm. The worst part of his struggle with the wind and waves was not, however, come yet. The part of the lagoon between Venice and Murano, the celebrated and secular seat of the glass manufactory, is so land-locked that the storm was not much felt there. But when he had shot out past the last corner of Murano, it needed all his perfect skill and exceptional strength and vigour to keep his boat's head to the wind and drive her through the surging water. But he stuck to the work bravely; and though the perspiration poured from his brow like rain as he bent forward over the oar, and though it was

considerably past midnight before his short voyage was accomplished, he pushed his gondola safely and unerringly at last into a small creek, which nothing but a very perfect acquaintance with the locality could have enabled him to find in the thick darkness.

In the next minute, however, it became evident that the violence of the storm had not prevented him from being expected; for as he sprang ashore, and was fastening his boat to the stump of a broken marble column, a figure stepped from behind the shelter afforded by a fragment of a broken fence of reeds, and came towards the water's edge. Zuane's business, as we know, was to seek for men. And, had the darkness continued, it might have been supposed that he had fallen in with a promising recruit, for the figure was evidently youthful, and of fair stature. But just at that moment the moon shone out, as she had done two or three times before during Zuane's voyage, and showed the individual, who had clearly been waiting his arrival, to be of the sex less available for recruiting purposes. Yes! the figure of a young girl, and one which the capricious moonlight did well to shine on, for she was worth looking at.

She could not have been above eighteen, even allowing for the more rapid development of everything that grows, and of the human form among the rest, in these latitudes. Her hair, of the true Titian auburn tint, was arranged in a labyrinth of plaits, which served to show its wonderful length and abundance, and coiled round her head in a high coronet. At the back were inserted two or three long silver pins, with massive ornamented heads. She wore a dress of dark printed stuff, falling in ample folds to a little above the ankle. A white muslin kerchief was crossed over her bosom, and on it rested a gold cross attached to a row of coral beads. Long gold earrings of filagree work hung from her ears. The short skirt exhibited to advantage a neat ankle and a pair of slender feet in spotless white stockings and the peculiar heelless slipper worn by the women of these regions. Over her



shoulders hung the white veil, called here the "Indiana," universal among the female population of the islands. It serves to set off admirably the pale, olive-coloured skins and delicately-cut features which mostly distinguish the women of the lagoons, and can be gathered over the head and bust in an endless variety of coquettish folds. It was a charming face in all respects, but its crowning glory was a pair of long, deep violet-coloured eyes, of that peculiar hue which, with their, fringe of long dark lashes, always form so lovely a combination with light hair. Such was Olinda, the only daughter of old Placido Pavanello, fisherman and landowner of Torcello. Landowner indisputably, for he was the undoubted proprietor of some rood or two of arid, half-cultivated island-soil, which had never, from long beyond the memory of man, owned any other lord than a Pavanello. Old Placido would not have exchanged that patch of wretched soil out there among the greedy waters of the Adriatic for any similar quantity of the fattest pasture-land in the valley of Lombardy, though the profit of it might be reckoned by a very small number of yearly francs. He and his daughter were mainly dependent on his skill and industry as a fisherman for their means of existence. Nevertheless, it was easily to be seen that Olinda was not altogether as the majority of her compeers. There was a delicacy about her person, and a daintiness about her habiliments, that showed that more than usual protecting care and petting had gone to the fostering of her. Her apparel, as regarded its form and fashion, was exactly that of all the other girls of the island; but there was a dainty nicety about it, and a grace in the wearing of it, that was by no means shared by the rest of the female population. It might also be seen, however, that, little as the place and the hour might have led one to expect it, all the little toilette elegancies at her disposition had been put in requisition on the present occasion.

Yes, there could be no doubt that Zuane had been waited for.

Nevertheless, he seemed himself to be surprised at the extremely pleasant apparition that greeted his landing.

"You here, Linda?" he exclaimed, in a tone of astonishment; "and on such a night as this! And it must be past midnight, though I left Venice at nine. All the wind in the sky is blowing over the lagoon, and it's the mercy of the Madonna that I got here at all. And I ought to have been here more than an hour ago. *Anima mia!* (These last words might be taken as a pious ejaculation applied to the speaker's own soul, or as an expression of tenderness applied to his hearer, according to the choice of the latter.)

"The night is not amiss; on land at least. It must be bad enough on the lagoon. But the wind is in the south; it is not cold. I have been waiting since a little after ten. I knew you would be so disappointed not to meet father at the landing-place. Zuane." There was half a moment's pause before the utterance of the last word, and then it was dropped so timidly, and with such an involuntary expression of tenderness from the lips—perhaps in penitence for the monstrous falsehood of the fib which had preceded it—that Zuane's attempted reply resulted only in a gurgling sort of sigh, and had to be supplemented by a rapid movement, which placed him closely by her side.

"Father said there was no getting across the lagoon to-night, and he made sure you would not come. So he went to Mazzorbo (a neighbouring island) to look up the young men there. I am afraid he will not be back for an hour or more yet!"

"But he won't land here coming from Mazzorbo!" said Zuane, maliciously; and he ought to have been whipped for saying it!

Olinda dropped her eyes to the ground beneath his gaze, and carefully making hieroglyphics with the point of her little slipper on the sand, as she spoke, said: "I was waiting to meet you, Zuane because I knew you would be so disappointed in not finding father here!"

This time she succeeded in eliciting a reply in words.

“Disappointed! *O Dio mio!* Disappointed! at getting the rare chance of passing an hour with you, and telling you what I have been so long burning to say to you! Disappointed! I never was so happy in all my life as I am at this moment! And don’t you know, in your heart of hearts, Linda, *tesoro dell’ anima mia*, that that is God’s own truth!”

And while he was speaking, he very timidly, and one might almost say cautiously, raised his arm round her till it was at the height of her waist, but still without venturing palpably to touch, much less clasp it. Linda, with the consciousness of the exact whereabouts of his arm thrilling through every nerve of her, stood motionless as a statue, as if she feared that the slightest movement might be interpreted as indicating a desire to escape from that rudimentary and half-developed embrace.

“I am glad you are not disappointed, Zuane!” she said, whispering the words as though she were afraid that the passing wind might hear them.

“Si’or Placido thought I should not come across the lagoon to-night. But there was somebody else who *knew* I should come! waiting too till this time at night!” And then the hand, which had advanced itself round to the front of the little waist, permitted itself to touch the belt that circled it with an almost imperceptible pressure. Perceptible enough, however, to the object of it to cause her, by an equally infinitesimal approach, to bring her head the least bit in the world nearer to his shoulder. Certainly she did not bring it into absolute contact with him; but the effect of the indubitable approximation was like that of presenting to each other the positive and negative needles when charged with electricity! The electric spark passed; and Zuane’s arm and hand with a sudden rush closed around her and pressed her to his side, while her face, upturned for the first time since their meeting, received his kiss! And then they both knew all about it! Knew that each was all in all to the other—that each

belonged to the other. Very few were the words that had been spoken ; but no others were needed !

Of course there had been words of courtesy between them which had not said much—glances which had said much more—solitary musings, dreamings, hopes, and fears. But of courtship, of “ paying addresses,” of love declarations, of acceptance, of betrothal—all was comprised in the brief scene that has been recounted, on the deserted shore of the little lagoon island in that stormy midnight hour !

In some of the business of life these southrons are apt to be slow and dilatory ; but in some other departments of it they can, as the reader sees, be rapid enough !

After the all too rapid passage of a few precious moments, well remembered by both of them during more than fifty years of subsequent life, Linda, dropping any further reference to the subject of Zuane’s disappointment, said, as she quietly put her arm within his, “ Shall we go to the landing-place where father will come ashore from Mazzorbo, or shall we go and wait for him at home ? But, tired as you must be, we had better go to the house perhaps.”

“ Henceforward, *benedetto tesoro mio*, it is all one to me which way I go, so that I go with you ! ”

And with that they turned to walk towards the fisherman’s habitation.

It was a strange walk that, across the almost deserted island, stranded by the centuries on the shore of the stream of time ! not strange to Linda Pavanello and Zuane Zeno—they were of course thinking solely of each other—but strange enough to any less preoccupied observer. A strange walk it is by daylight ; and it was stranger still at that weird hour ! They passed through small enclosures, divided by attempts at fences made of joined reeds, which looked like little fields that had “ suffered a sea change ” ; had drifted out to sea and been wrecked and starved to the palest sand-complexion ; by the margins of half-dried-up canals, once the watery highways between rows of stately palaces ; over bridges, the cut

stones of whose arches barely still clung together sufficiently to support their steps ; bridges which no longer connected anything save one patch of barren sand with its fellow. And yet they were walking over the site of a once proud city ; over what had once been quays thronged by vessels laden with rich cargoes and crowds of busy traffickers ; over the foundations of buildings which had been the homes of generations that had succeeded each other for more than ten centuries, but of which literally no stone now remains upon another !

The wind changed during their short walk. And as they came near the ghost-like group of buildings which, once the heart's core of the ancient city, are now the only habitable remains of it, the moon was shining out of a clear sky.

Perhaps no more intensely melancholy scene, no spot more eloquent in all its characteristics and surroundings of caducity and decay, and the transitory nature of man's most durable achievements, can be found on all the face of the earth. Noble castles have been built on green fields—the castles have had their day, and have fallen ; but the green fields remain and re-assert themselves. But here the very soil on which the city was built, in the presence of a mightier and more eternal force and of a more active enemy, seems as if it were returning to the condition of earth before it was yet fitted for the occupation of man. There is still the very ancient cathedral, with its tall white tower showing itself across the lagoons like a pale ghost, a treasure to the archæologist and a delight to the artist ; and the skeleton of what was once the seat of the Torcello legislature, rocking in its fall, but yet testifying that Torcello was once among not the meaner of earth's cities—a truth that is further attested in a yet more striking and singular manner by the strange fact, that the latest of the recorded acts of the city legislature is dated only two years before the period at which the events here related took place ; and, more singular still, that this act relates to the admission of one Vincenzo Lucerini to the

rights and privileges of a member of the Grand Council of Torcello. Certainly human ambition has occasionally proposed strange aims to itself, but that of the man who, in 1795, aspired to form part of the "Grand Council" of this desolate island, does seem to indicate a faculty for living on, in, and for the past, which has probably never been equalled; unless, indeed, it may be supposed that this membership of the phantom aristocracy of a city of ghosts carried with it some privileges of exclusive fishing—which is possible. I should not like, however, even now, to utter these last sentences publicly on what was once the grand piazza of the city; for the scanty remnant of the once teeming population is still proud of its ruined city, proud of its ancestry, proud of its ancient glories, and of its name.

Thoughts of this kind would have been likely enough to occupy the mind of old Placido Pavanello when crossing the desolate *Grand Piazza* on his homeward way some hour or so later. But such were not the thoughts that busied the heads or hearts of Olinda and Zuane as they traversed the same path. Very closely pressed side to side they walked, his left arm round her waist, while she held his brown, oar-hardened right palm between both her slender hands in front of them; for were they not already indissolubly pledged to each other? And what impertinent eye was there to spy, save that of the chaste moon, no longer coyly playing hide-and-seek behind the clouds, but looking down serenely and approvingly on the lovers? They traversed the piazza in an oblique direction between the old cathedral wall on the right and the still partially inhabited "*Palazzo Pubblico*" on the left, passing close to a singular, massive marble chair, the episcopal seat of bishops gone to dust ten centuries ago, and now strangely placed, nobody knows why or when, all by itself in the midst of the open space of the piazza. And quitting this at the corner nearest to the east end of the cathedral, a few steps farther on, they reached the fisherman's dwelling. It was, like every other building and thing on the

island, a ruin. But the inhabited rooms were water-tight ; and among two or three other little evidences of neater womanly care than any of its neighbour dwellings exhibited, there were in a long box on one of the massive weather-blackened stone window-sills some thriving carnations and a cactus or two with its brilliant scarlet flowers in bloom, producing a mass of gay and youthful colour that made a contrast with that of the dark and stern old walls, typical of the similar contrast between Olinda herself and the moral and melancholy aspects of the life to which destiny had assigned her. The house had evidently once been a house of pretension and consequence—a “palazzo.” Probably old Placido would have told you the “Palazzo Pavanello.” And it is likely enough that such a pretension might have been an authorized one, for the name occurs more than once in the still preserved lists of the ancient island dignitaries. The old fisherman, the vitality and clinging adhesiveness of whose race had made him still a survivor where time and change had submerged or swept away so much else, may well have been the lineal descendant of some former doge ; and mace-bearers and train-bearers may have on state occasions preceded and followed the master of that house as he passed down those weather-blackened steps to attend some ceremony in the neighbouring Palazzo Pubblico. The ground-floor of the building was now occupied by the fisherman’s nets and the other implements of his calling. The interior steps, which have been referred to, led to the first floor, where the two or three rooms still inhabited were situated. Heavy unpainted shutters closed the windows of the other rooms on this floor, and the floor above seemed to have reached a more advanced stage on the way to final ruin.

But neither of all this did Zuane take any note. Placida’s home was familiar to him ; for many a conference had been held there regarding the hopes and possibilities of collecting among the men of the islands a force which might have assisted in the defence of Venice. And ardent as Zuane was

in the cause, it is probable that old Placido may have occasionally found his attention wandering from the business in hand, while occupying himself with matters which culminated—more happily than the other affairs—in the scene we have witnessed.

From that first heavenly moment of mutual avowal at the landing-place amid the storm, during the walk across the island, everything had been forgotten save the ecstasy of present consciousness. But when they found themselves within the dark shadow of the gloomy room (not the one where the flowers were), in which the fisherman and his daughter lived, something—possibly the poor and barren aspect of all that surrounded them—seemed to suggest the consideration of the future before them, and to throw certain shadows over the prospect of it.

Was there not reason to fear that the lovers had listened too exclusively to the dictates of their own hearts in assuming for themselves the position of an affianced couple? Might there not have been in this a reckoning without the host that might bode future sorrow and trouble? Zuane was only twenty, and was entirely dependent on his father. But had he been thirty, to marry in defiance of the will and prohibition of a father is a step that is rarely and very reluctantly taken by an Italian. Nor if Zuane had been willing to take it, was it to be supposed that old Pavanello would have allowed his daughter to go to a husband under such circumstances. And was it to be expected that Marco Zeno would approve the marriage of his son with the penniless daughter of a Torcello fisherman? Zuane, indeed, knew better than Olinda did how little this was to be hoped for. He knew that his father was a much richer man than Pavanello and his daughter could reasonably imagine him to be. He knew that the old picture-dealer had high aspirations for the advancement of his son. And as these thoughts passed through his mind he became sad. Not that the idea of renouncing his love presented itself to him as any possible



solution of the difficulties he saw ahead ; but he foresaw sorrow. And it needed but half a word to cause the shadow which was throwing itself across his mind to be reflected on that of Olinda. Her young mind had never hitherto been led to contemplate, much less to grieve over, the poverty, obscurity, and lowliness of her own lot in life. But she was very humble-minded ; and at the first turning of her thought in that direction saw at one dismayed glance all the length of social distance that separated her from her lover.

It came to pass then that the conversation between the pair, though to the full as loving as ever, had assumed a grave and serious character, not untinged with melancholy, when the heavy tread of Si'or Placido's huge fisherman's boots was heard on the steps outside.

"Linda's right enough !" said her father, after the first warm greeting between the old and the young man ; "I gave you up ! I hardly thought anybody could have got a boat across the lagoon to-night single-handed. It was as much as I could do to get to Mazzorbo even ! But I have not been for nothing ! Five names promised, my lad ! and good ones ! But there's not many that for the sake of Venice would have come from Murano to Torcello such a night as this !" he added, casting an admiring glance at the young fellow as he spoke. "If all the lads in the Veneto were like you, we'd soon show those accursed Frenchmen that the old winged lion has not lost his teeth yet !"

"I trust we shall give them that lesson," said Zuane, "but I won't take credit when I don't deserve it. It was not to talk to you, Si'or Placido—not mainly—that I crossed the lagoon to-night."

"What for, then, in the name of all the saints ?" said the old man, staring at him, and stopping short in the arduous task of withdrawing his legs from his enormous boots.

"It was to see Olinda. I want her to be my wife !" returned Zuane, with a direct brevity that seemed to be dictated by a determination to prove both to Linda and to

himself that the tone of their late conversation had in no degree impaired his fixed resolution to reach that upshot sooner or later.

Si'or Placido stood with one stockinged foot on the floor, and one uplifted boot in his hand, staring from one to the other of the lovers.

"So, then, this was the meaning of your patriotism, was it, *figliuolo mio*!" he said with a sneer that had some bitterness in it.

"No! Si'or Placido! Not so, I came here before I had ever seen your daughter."

"That's true too," said the old man after a pause. He then proceeded leisurely to pull off the other boot, and when that was accomplished, sat himself heavily down in his old wooden arm-chair, and letting his grand white old head fall on his breast, remained in deep thought for a few moments.

"Well, Zuane Zeno," said he at the end of that time, "I'll speak honestly too. As times go, I don't know a young man in Venice or the islands that I would rather give my girl to. As times go," he added, nodding his head several times, and drawing a deep sigh. "The time has been when a Venetian retail dealer's son—you'll pardon me for putting the thing as it is—would no more have dreamed of mating with the daughter of a Pavanello of Torcello than he would have dreamed of marrying the emperor's daughter! But those days are gone! gone! gone! gone as much as I shall be before long. And then that child, with the last drop of the Pavanello blood in her veins, would be left alone in the world. Yes! take her, Zuane! take her! I know that you are good, and brave, and true, and that you love Venice. I am glad that she should be your wife. Never forget, and never let your children forget, what blood their mother has in her veins, and who and what her fathers were!"

All this was of course very satisfactory. Only that the point of view from which the proud old man looked at the

matter, and the tone in which he spoke of it, were so unexpected, and so far from "harping aright" the fears of the young couple, that, oppressed by the difficulty of bringing their own views and those of the old man into any sort of accordance, they remained mutely glancing at each other. It would clearly have been of no use, however, to attempt to open Si'or Placido's eyes to the nature of the real difficulties they apprehended on that occasion. And after a few more words of friendly talk between the two men, and an entreaty by Zuane, tacitly conveyed by the eye-language of lovers, that Linda would accompany him on his return walk to his boat, and a tacit acquiescence on hers, Zuane started on his way back to Venice.

Quite determined to lose no time in fronting the difficulties which he knew lay before him, he went the first thing the next morning into a little interior court of old Marco Polo's house, where he knew his father was busy with a new acquisition. Old Marco was in high good-humour, engaged in examining, spectacles on nose and magnifying-glass in hand, a picture which he had, Heaven knows by what means, succeeded in abstracting from a church, and finding it a greater treasure than he had anticipated.

"Whose brush painted that black bit of canvas?" cried he to his son, as the latter entered the little court.

"The kitchen wench, I should say, with the soot off the bottom of her pots and pans, to look at it!" said his son.

"You would say! Ay! and so would most people say. But I tell you that that canvas was painted by the hand of one Jacopo Robusti, commonly called Tintoretto, and by none other. Aha! Old eyes are sometimes better than young ones, I wot! And to think of those animals of priests covering such a work as this, layer after layer, with the smoke of their filthy candles. It is enough to break one's heart to think of it!"

"But if they had not done so, and had known better, the picture would not have come into *your* hands, father!"

"That's true too, my boy! Not so badly said! Not so badly said!" returned the old man, again bending down over his treasure, and lovingly removing, with a finger moistened by his tongue, some of the secular dirt that lay thick on the cheek of a Madonna.

"Can I help you with your job, father?"

"No, no! no hands but my own. Not a touch. Go you about your own affairs. And be careful. Not that the old fools in the palace yonder would dare to lay a hand on you. But be careful all the same."

"Yes father, I will! And I have good hope of being able to do something for the cause. But, father, before I go I want to speak to you a minute about myself."

The old man looked up from his task sharply.

"Not to be longer than need be about it," continued Zuane, "I want your consent to my marriage with the best and loveliest girl my eyes ever rested on. I am quite sure you will be charmed with her."

"Not longer than need be," said his father, slowly, after staring at him through his spectacles for some instants. "No; you are not longer about it than need be, certainly. Perhaps I may be somewhat longer; but then I am old, you know. Who is the lady?"

"The daughter of one of the best friends to the good cause, and one of the honestest citizens Venice has to boast of," said Zuane, firmly.

"That is all very well. And, pray, where did you meet with him and with her?"

"In the first instance, in going among the islands on the business you know of, father. He is a landowner of Torcello."

"A landowner of Torcello! Are you mad? A landowner? A dry ditch and rush owner, you mean. A landowner who gets his living from the water, I take it. Why there's not a soul on Torcello, more's the pity, save a handful of poor fishermen, each more poverty-stricken than the other."

"The father of Olinda is a fisherman, certainly; and, I suppose, not rich," said Zuane, very quietly.

"There; let me attend to my Tintoretto; and don't talk nonsense. No! I will not give my consent to your marrying a Torcello fisherman's daughter! I have other views for you. Off with you!"

Zuane judged that it would be his wisest course not to pursue the matter any farther just then, especially as it was clear that, putting aside his objections to the wishes of his son, the old picture-dealer wanted at that moment to get rid of him, and be left to savour the enjoyment of gradually discovering the beauties of his new acquisition. So he went off, to wander by himself on the solitary *Fondamenta Nuova*, which looked out on the lagoon towards Torcello, and meditate on Olinda's sweetness, and beauty, and modest grace.

That night his gondola was again skimming the lagoon between Venice and Torcello; and the little voyage was much more easily made. It was a lovely moonlight night, and he reached the sad and deserted-looking creek that made his landing-place more than an hour earlier than he had arrived the preceding night. Nothing had been said between him and Olinda about his coming on that night, but she was there awaiting him at the landing-place, and both seemed to take it as a matter of course that they should meet there.

In ancient documents recording the meetings of ambassadors and other great personages for the despatch of business, the chroniclers were often wont to place the letters P.P. at the beginning of their record, and then go at once to the business in hand. The P.P. meant "*Præmissis prætermittendis*," and the writers deemed themselves thus dispensed from recounting all the details of ceremonial which were a matter of course. Now it seems to me that my readers will be able to imagine for themselves all that took place between Zuane and Olinda with sufficient vividness and accuracy to justify me in passing on with a P.P. to the less pleasant portions of the business to be treated between them. It was impossible

any longer to defer communicating to Si'or Placido the nature and cause of the difficulty which has arisen in their path. But both Zuane and Olinda felt that this was a difficult task, and feared that the revelation might convert Olinda's father into a more obstinate opponent than Zuane's. Nevertheless the thing had to be done, and Zuane performed it as skilfully and delicately as he could. The old fisherman was at first very slow to understand the nature of the difficulty, and when it was at last made clear to him, he seemed to be more astonished than offended. He had so genuinely believed that *he* was the party condescending to an alliance for his daughter which was much beneath her! Surely the world must not only be strangely changed since his day, but altogether turned topsy-turvy.

"My children," said the old man at length, "it cannot be that Signor Marco Zeno, our Zuane's worthy father, has understood this matter aright. Signor Marco was much occupied, as it seems, when Zuane spoke with him; and perhaps my young friend himself is not aware of all the circumstances that might recommend the alliance he is anxious to make to his father. I shall have the honour of paying a visit to Signor Marco Zeno myself. I think you will find, my dears, that he will change his mind after he has heard what I have to say to him."

So on the following day Signor Placido Pavanello found his way to the picture-dealer's obscure dwelling in the Campiello Sabion, dressed in the grand suit reserved for many a year for occasions of high festival and ceremony. And a very fine and grand old man he looked as he entered the presence of the picture-dealer. Under his arm he carried what seemed to be a small and very thin folio volume, about the size of a sheet of foolscap paper, bound in red leather. Old Marco, to whom the name of his visitor had been announced, and who was, therefore, well aware of the nature of his business, had intended to receive him sitting. But he rose to his feet, despite himself, as the tall and upright old

man, whose bearing was such as it might have been if he had concentrated in his own person the quintessential spirit of all the past Doges of his beloved island, entered the room, and, uncovering his white hairs, saluted him with lofty courtesy. It was a perfect triumph of that influence of the eternally and visibly grand and noble to which the Italians are so specially susceptible.

"Signor Zeno," he said, after a few words of courtesy had passed between the two old men, spoken in a tone of equality which the picture-dealer would not have believed possible between himself and so poor a man as his visitor, "I take it, from what those blundering young people of ours have told me, that you have not rightly apprehended the position of the lady to whose hand your excellent son aspires."

"Aspires!" echoed old Marco, in a tone which would have been a sneer if it had not been forced into another key by genuine astonishment.

"Aspires," repeated Signor Placido, quietly and firmly. "You are, I am told, a rich man, Signor Zeno," he continued, "and I am a very poor one. And it is not unreasonable, when the hearts and heads of young folks are carried away by very different feelings, for the fathers to consider what each can contribute to the proposed partnership."

"It is very reasonable, I take leave to think," put in old Marco.

"Nevertheless, a parent who is really anxious for his child's happiness will allow some weight to the dictates of the child's own heart. And that moves me to waive the too close weighing of the difference which, despite the wealth you possess, makes the contribution which my daughter will bring to the proposed match by far the greater."

"I am utterly unable to understand what you mean," said the picture-dealer, thoroughly mystified.

"One minute and you will see. Wealth is a good thing, but it may be gained . . . or lost. My Olinda possesses that which cannot be lost, and can hardly ever more be gained,"

said the old fisherman, dropping his voice and sadly shaking his head, as he uttered the last words. "Look at this, Signor Zeno," he continued, taking the old volume which has been mentioned from under his arm. "To you of all men, if what I have heard of you be true, it is needless to say one word in explanation of the importance of the document I am going to show you. This is an extract, duly guaranteed and witnessed by a notary public, you observe, from the *Libro d' Oro* of Torcello, testifying to all men that the name of the poor fisherman who stands before you, and of his fathers before him for many and many a generation, have had their place on that record. You are a reader of archives, Signor Marco. Look into the archives, and you will find the name of Pavanello in some of the noblest places in the history of my country. Nor need I remind one who is so well read in Venetian history as yourself, that in the proudest days of Venice her wealthiest senators have deemed the nobility attested by the *Libro d' Oro* of Torcello to be a sufficient dowry for the bride of their sons."

Signor Marco Zeno was too good a Venetian, and too fervent an antiquarian and lover of the past, not to be considerably impressed by the statements made and the evidences offered to him. He did not yield immediately and on the spot but he did eventually. And Olinda's dower—not the first by any means, but probably the last that will ever be supplied from that source—was furnished by her right to the patricianship established by the celebrated and still preserved *LIBRO D' ORO* di Torcello.



VITTORIA ACCORAMBONI.

A TRUE ITALIAN HISTORY.



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### CHAPTER I.

#### GOING UP TO TOWN TO BE "BROUGHT OUT."

It was in the last quarter of that stormy and many-coloured sixteenth century—time of "renaissance" we call it, but a time of universal dissolution and near approaching end of all things, as it appeared to the Tribulation-mongers of that day—that the following facts occurred. They really did occur. No filling in of historical outline with lights and shadows of fictitious detail, and no heightening of colour for the sake of effect, shall be attempted in this narrative; the reader is invited to receive the tale as a piece of well-authenticated history: showing, somewhat strikingly, how the world went in the good old times three hundred years ago.

There lived in the remote little city of Gubbio an ancient but obscure family of provincial nobles, named Accoramboni. Gubbio, in its pleasant niche at the western foot of that part of the Apennines which crosses the province of the ecclesiastical state called the Marches, was a long way from Rome—a longer way, taking all the difficulties of the journey into account, than London is now-a-days. And in proportion to its distance from Rome, the centre of life,

wealth, honour, preferment, and all good things, despite its ante-Roman Etrurian reminiscences, and other claims to respect, was life at Gubbio stagnant and obscure. The sun, to use Queen Dido's metaphor, yoked his team very far away from the quiet little city under the Apennines. Count Claudio Accoramboni and his countess, however, might have been content to live and die, and make their wine and press their olives on the paternal acres, as a long line of unrecorded Accorambonis had done before them, had they not chanced to have a daughter, who grew in this rustic retirement so rare a perfection of loveliness and grace, that her parents felt it to be their duty to the dear girl to give her a few seasons in town. In fact, Vittoria Accoramboni was rightly judged by her judicious parents to be far too superior an article for the native Gubbio market.

All the chroniclers—and they are many—who have left records of Vittoria and her eventful history, vie with each other in their enthusiastic accounts of her surpassing beauty. And yet this, we are assured, was but one portion of the irresistible charm with which she enchanted all who came within the sphere of her influence. One grave old monk writes—crossing himself, one may fancy, the while—of the “portentous power of attraction” which her tongue exercised when she spoke. Others speak of the inimitable grace of her movements, the sylph-like perfection of her form, her artless elegance, and entire freedom from all affectation. Her talents, too, were no less admirable than her beauty. She was a poetess; and if the productions of her muse, whether printed or preserved in manuscript, cannot be said to be much read by her countrymen of the present generation, yet they sufficed to obtain a place for her name in the huge volumes of the literary historians of her country. Quadrio, Tiraboschi, Mazzuchelli, and the others, all have a niche in their Pantheons for the fairest of their host of songstresses.

It has often been remarked that the wide differences of

social habits, and still more of moral feeling, which exist between one age and social system and another, make it exceedingly difficult for us duly to appreciate and understand the life of the middle ages, and to estimate fairly the characters of its actors. And, doubtless, the entire difference of our own practice and modes of thought with respect to such matters must have the effect of making the conduct of Count Claudio Accoramboni and his wife, in this business of the disposal of their peerless daughter to the best advantage, seem altogether strange and unnatural. As soon as ever her surpassing beauty, and rare endowments of mind and body, manifested themselves, Vittoria seems to have been considered by this sixteenth century family as a valuable piece of marketable property, to be disposed of in such manner as would produce the greatest amount of advantage to the family. The means adopted to this end, and the differences of opinion on the subject between various members of the family, will further illustrate the enormous differences of our own ways of thinking and acting on such subjects.

Rome, of course, was the only market for such merchandise as Count Claudio had to offer for sale; and to Rome, accordingly, the Accoramboni family removed. Vittoria had a good escort on her long and far from safe journey to the capital of the world; for, besides father and mother, four adult brothers accompanied her—remarkably noble and needy youths, all trusting to Vittoria, the family treasure, to open for them some of the numerous roads to fortune, which in those days all converged on the Papal city.

This wonderful Rome had still, in the sixteenth century, very legitimate pretensions to take rank as the capital of the civilized world. The authority which the popes claimed over all the civil powers of Christendom, and which, though often rebelled against in practice, was still admitted almost universally in theory, caused their capital to be the centre of all the political intrigues and schemes of Europe; caused it to be

perpetually thronged with ambassadors and diplomatists of every grade, with petitioners, adventurers, fortune-hunters, and notabilities of every sort from every part of the world. Most of the special peculiarities which stamped the age with its own social character existed in a concentrated degree at Rome. The system of superseding law by privilege, which lay at the root of most of the social disorders of the age, existed in greater intensity in Rome than in any other society. The turbulences and disorders arising thence were more constant, more audacious, and more serious there than elsewhere. The wonderful encroachment of ecclesiastical power, and its strange and curious intermixture in all the affairs of life, which also was one leading characteristic of the time, was, as might have been expected, most remarkable and most mischievously active in Rome. It was the head-quarters, too, of literature, art, and magnificence. The gorgeous and ostentatious splendour which characterized the period were there to be seen in their most dazzling excess and profusion. In no city of similar size, probably, was ever known so great an expenditure of wealth. For Rome, like a spendthrift swindler, had the spending of revenues drawn from every country in Europe. Unproductive herself, she squandered the lightly-come-by contributions from every hive of industrious workers, and was only left to beggary when her trick was detected.

Every new pope brought up fresh swarms of relatives, dependents, friends, countrymen, to seek their fortune in the great world-carnival. In the papacy of a Genoese pope, Rome would swarm with Ligurians. With a Medici in St. Peter's chair, Florence almost monopolized the good things which flow from the hand of Heaven's vicegerent. With the Bolognese pope, who held the keys at the time we are writing of, Bologna had her turn. And the hot pursuit of Fortune was all the hotter, and the means used for attracting her smile were all the more unscrupulous, because popes' reigns are mostly short. In no case was the need of hurry to make

hay while the sun shone more imperative. A pope's death was as a sudden and entire turn of the wheel of Fortune. Those who were at the top found themselves, between the rising and the setting of the sun, hurled to the bottom ; and those who were at the bottom as suddenly were lifted to the top. And the recurrence of these violent changes, which threw the whole Roman world into tenfold confusion, turbulence, and trouble, was strangely frequent. During the whole of the sixteenth century the popes reigned, on an average, only six years each. In the natural course of things it must be expected that the mode of making a pope would ensure his being an old man. But this probability was further increased by the frequent policy of the College of Cardinals. The different parties who found themselves, as would of course frequently happen, unable to secure the election they wished, would unite in selecting as pope some member of their body whose age and infirmities seemed to promise that they would very shortly have another opportunity of trying their strength in the conclave. Many popes owed their elevation solely to this consideration.

A thirteenth Gregory was seated in the chair of St. Peter at the time Vittoria and her family made their appearance on this seething, many-coloured, and turbulent scene. We have not the precise date of their journey. But it is certain that it was after 1576, and before—probably not much before—1580. Rome was in a yet more turbulent and lawless condition than usual during these years ; for the reigning pope was a particularly weak and incapable ruler. Gregory the Thirteenth, we are told, was not stained by any of those more glaring vices which had marked many of his recent predecessors. He simply neglected every portion of his manifold duties. His father, as one of the Venetian ambassadors reports to the Senate, lived to be eighty, and his grandfather to be ninety. And the great and absorbing object of the pope's thoughts and cares was to live as long. With this view, says the ambassador, he systematically

refused to occupy himself with any troublesome business, on the ground that nothing is more conducive to longevity than a mind at ease ! When reports were made to him of the scandalous scenes of anarchy and violence which were continually occurring, and were rendering his capital as unsafe a residence for quiet citizens as a field of battle or a den of robbers, he never was betrayed into expending more of his carefully-treasured vital force than was needed for tranquilly observing that he would pray for the evil-doers.

During this and the preceding centuries the great feudal princes and barons of the ancient and powerful clans of Savelli, Orsini, Colonna, Gaetani, and others such, were the pest and ever-present danger of Rome. Constantly in open warfare with each other, and often with the popes themselves, these haughty and unruly subjects, and their numerous bodies of armed retainers, who knew no law save the will of their employer, often tasked to the utmost the strength of the most vigorous of the popes. And under such a ruler as Gregory the Thirteenth their utter lawlessness reduced Rome to a state of anarchy which, had it continued unchecked, must have entirely sapped the foundations of all civil society. A notice of one of the ordinary street tumults that took place about the time in question, as it has been preserved in the pages of a contemporary chronicler, will serve to give an idea of the sort of deeds which were wont to pass in Rome unchecked and unpunished, and will, at the same time, introduce to the reader one of the principal *dramatis personæ* in the tale we have to tell.

The "Bargello," as the principal police-officer of the city was called, had, with his band of armed followers, arrested certain outlaws belonging to the territory of Naples ; and it would seem that these men were in the pay, or otherwise under the protection, of some one of the great Roman barons. While the bargello, therefore, was conducting his prisoners through the streets he was met by a cavalcade of noble youths, Raimondo Orsini, Pietro Gaetani, Silla Savelli, and



others, who disputed his passage. The bargello, writes the chronicler, "spoke to them cap in hand, with great respect, endeavouring to quiet them, and persuade them to let him do his duty. They, however, would hear nothing, but attacked him and his men, killed several, took others into houses, and flung them from the windows, to the great ignominy and contumely of public justice." All this, however, could not have mattered much, or have been worth recording, but that an unlucky shot from one of the bargello's men killed the noble Raimondo Orsini. The bargello at once fled from Rome, knowing full well that neither pope nor law could save his life from the vengeance of the Orsini. But the noble anger of that proud house was not to be thus balked. And Ludovico Orsini, the brother of Raimondo, and the gentleman with whom the reader will have to make further acquaintance, avenged his brother, and asserted the honour of the clan, by murdering the lieutenant-general of police, the officer on whom the bargello depended, as he was coming down from the papal palace on Monte Cavallo.

Such was the Roman world to which Count Claudio Accoramboni was bringing his daughter and four sons to seek their fortunes about the year 1578.

But in accordance with the saying, that when things are at the worst they must mend, there was a change preparing for Rome and its lawless nobles, and almost equally villainous outlawed bandits, in a manner and from a quarter from which no human being in Rome dreamed of expecting it.

Among the cardinals resident in the city was an old man whose infirmities made him seem yet older than he was, and whose quiet and retired life was remarkable only for its purity and for its perfect inoffensiveness to any man alive. Nor were the social position or connexions of this good old man more calculated to draw attention on him than the unpretending modesty of his blameless life. For the old Cardinal di Montalto was the son of a peasant of the March of Ancona; had begun life as an humble mendicant friar; and having first

risen by his virtues and talents to be the general of his order, had by this road reached the cardinalate. Yet it was on this obscure old man that the eyes of his fellows of the Sacred College had turned as the most likely candidate for the papacy, on the evidently not distant day when Gregory the Thirteenth, despite all his precautions, should not be able to live any longer. There were not wanting members of the college bearing the names of Medici, Este, Farnese, and others of the great princely families of Italy ; but every man was afraid of his fellow. Most men in Rome at that day, whether clerical or lay, had so much cause to fear. And it was thought that no man need fear poor old Cardinal di Montalto, who had never given offence to any one, or seemed capable of conceiving a feeling of animosity or resentment. Besides the very manifest infirmities of old Peretti—that was the Cardinal di Montalto's family name—his tottering gait and bent body were, on the principle above mentioned, all recommendations in his favour. It was clear he could not last long. And his short papacy would give rival parties time, as each hoped, to strengthen itself, and to be ready then for the struggle which they feared to undertake at the present moment. As for the old man himself, when spoken to on the subject, he would treat the matter as one in which a man so near the grave could have little interest ; and with a mild sigh and gentle shake of his bent head, followed by a hollow cough, would give his hearers to understand how entirely his mind was occupied on other things.

Rome, however, though quite agreeing with the Cardinal di Montalto in the opinion that he could not last long, yet thought it probable that he would last longer than the octogenarian pope ; and considered that for such brief space he would be the most convenient, inoffensive, meek pope that could be found. Despite himself, therefore, Felix Peretti, Cardinal di Montalto, occupied an important position in the Roman world when the Accoramboni family arrived in the Eternal City.

## CHAPTER II.

## THREE STRINGS TO THE HEROINE'S BOW.

THE "sensation" caused by the first appearance of the beauty on this great theatre and focus of all the grandeurs of the world, exceeded all that the proprietors of the new "great attraction" had promised themselves. All Rome talked of nothing else than the lovely and all-accomplished Vittoria. Cardinals met to discuss the rival pretensions of the French and Spanish courts, but found themselves neglecting such trifling matters to expatiate, quite *en connaisseurs*, on the marvellous perfections of the young provincial from the Marches. Princes of the noblest and most powerful families of Italy, young and old, single or married, swore that the bewitching stranger was worthy of promotion to the honour of becoming—the plaything of an hour to any one of them. Father, mother, and brothers, all found themselves suddenly changed into people of importance; sought for, courted, and made much of by magnates lay and ecclesiastical, into whose presence they would have hardly ventured to come cap in hand a few short weeks ago. In a word, their speculation promised excellently well; and only prudence was needed to make the most of it. Very much prudence—Italian prudence, of a far more long-sighted and subtly calculating kind than is ordinarily known to the more off-hand and open men of a less guileful race. This excess of prudence, and the exaggerated value attached to it, and admiration of it, is a marked and peculiar characteristic of the Italian character. It is not a pleasing one. And were it not that there seem to be reasons for believing that the same peculiarity marked the old Roman character, it might be attributed to the unhappy social organization which has for so many centuries sown the field of society broadcast with dangers and pitfalls of all kinds, so as to make every man afraid of his neighbour. It

is difficult not to place somewhat of the strange cautiousness which meets one at every turn both in Italian histories of the past and in the modern life of the people, to the account of this cause. But we remember the dictum of the old poet, who more than any other has daguerreotyped for us the life, manners, and modes of thought of the old Roman world—Horace—to the effect that “no one of the gods refuses his favour to the man whom Prudence stands by,” and recognise in the thought the ancestors of Italy’s present and mediæval inhabitants.

The game now to be played out by the combined sagacity of the Accoramboni family was one which called forth all the resources of this favourite faculty. If the prizes in the wheel were numerous and splendid, so also were the dangers which lay thick and various round about them; so many things had to be considered in that strangely constituted and cynically corrupt Roman world, which the members of a simpler, because a more law-governed, state of society would never dream of. Enmities had to be forecastingly provided against. And if this were impossible, they were to be providently counteracted by such protections as might be most suited for overcoming them; and if it were absolutely inevitable to give offence either to one or to another person, the means of injuring possessed by either at the time being or prospectively in the future, had to be carefully and sagaciously compared and balanced. And in a state of society where every man, from my lord cardinal down to the vagabond, who was first cousin to the laundress who washed for my lord cardinal’s valet, and every woman, from the princess of an all-but sovereign house down to the old hag on whose daughter one of his highness’s lawless free lances was known to cast an eye of affection—all in every class and in every degree sought to secure life, property, and advancement, not by their own merits or industry, or the protection of the public law, but by favour, privilege, and patronage—in such a state of society these calculations and provisions were com-

plex and difficult matters, as will be seen in the sequel of this true history.

No part of the difficulty which lay before Vittoria's judicious father and anxious mother, arose from lack of eligible candidates for their daughter's favour. Suitors on all sorts of terms came forward in abundance. To choose wisely and prudently among them was the point. And the difficulty of the case was sadly increased by a discordance of opinion between Vittoria's papa and mamma. The case was as follows: From among the crowd of pretendants, three stood forward prominently as the most promising. The first was Francesco Peretti, the favourite nephew of poor quiet old Cardinal di Montalto. The Perettis were poor, and not even noble. What then had simple Francesco Peretti to offer, that could justify him in dreaming of carrying off a prize that princes and cardinals were disputing? His personal qualifications may have been high, or may have been none at all. Of the many contemporary writers who have expressly or incidentally mentioned the facts of this history, no one has thought it worth his while to advert even to such irrelevant circumstances. But Francesco Peretti was the nephew of the uncle; and it might well be that the nephew of old Fra Felice (Friar Felix, as we should say) would turn out to be the greatest catch in all Rome. For all the world in the Eternal City seemed to have made up their minds that the decrepit old cardinal friar was to be pope. And a pope's favourite nephew! And such a pope; a meek old man used to the quietest retirement, without worldly sense or passion in him enough to resent the taking of his cloak off his back! Why, it would be as good as having the papacy itself for one's dower! "And then, my dear Vittoria, it is your duty, you know, to think of your family. There are four brothers! God knows, it's little enough I can do for them. But with the position that such a marriage would place you in, there are no limits—positively *no* limits to the hopes that might open before all of us." It is true that in catching Peretti, Vittoria was

playing her great stake for a bird not in the hand, but still in the bush of the future. It was possible, after all, that the Cardinal di Montalto might never be pope. But on the other hand, the Peretti marriage was free from great risks and perils which surrounded the union with another of the trio of aspirants, who, out of all those that at first entered their names, finally ran for the plate.

All these things duly meditated and calculated, papa Accoramboni declared himself decidedly in favour of knocking down all that desirable lot, with magnificent head of hair annexed, lovely eyes, attractive form, brilliant accomplishments laid on regardless of expense, &c. &c. &c., known by the name and title of Vittoria Accoramboni to Francesco Peretti, as to the best bidder.

But, as has been said, there was an unhappy difference of opinion between the chiefs of the Accoramboni councils. And while in reply to Peretti's proposals, "papa said, yes! she may; mamma said, no! she shan't!" For the female imagination was dazzled by the brilliant magnificence of the second candidate for her daughter's hand. This was no less a man than the Italian historical reader's old acquaintance, Prince Paolo Giordano Orsini! There was an offer! the head of all the Orsini clan! the noblest family in Rome! The owner of immense territories, and so powerful that popes themselves quailed before him, and hesitated to put the law in execution against him or his. Was such a son-in-law to be for a moment compared to the obscure nephew of an old monk, who might or might not one day be pope? In this case the bird was a bird in the hand, and not one in the bush; and a bird of such dazzling plumage! The prince was the man for the lady mother's money; and if her word was worth anything, no trumpery commoner should ever have her darling child, &c. &c. &c.—a whole page of *et-ceteras*!

There were, however, some drawbacks to the brilliant advantages of a union with the prince; that must be ad-

mitted. In the first place—and this was the consideration that chiefly weighed with the prudent and wary father—the whole of the powerful and unscrupulous Orsini clan would doubtless be furious at such a mismatch on the part of its chief. And there were other very influential personages likely to be highly offended by the marriage. It was not without reason, in short, that Count Claudio Accoramboni considered the connexion, however flattering, as doubly hazardous. Then, again, the noble Orsini had, about two years previously, murdered his first wife. Not that such a circumstance could be held in any wise to sully the character of one in the untackable position of the Prince Orsini, or that any great weight should be attributed to an accident that would frequently happen in the noblest families. Still, Vittoria's father thought that, all other things being equal, it might be held to be an objection to a son-in-law in the eyes of a fond parent; while her mamma felt strongly that in the case of a prince, it was mere invidious cavilling to rake up matters of a kind that were never alluded to in really good society. Again: though of course no nobility could be more exalted, more undoubted, more ancient and celebrated than that of the chief of the great house of Orsini, whose names are to be found on every page of the history of their country for hundreds of years back, as the constant disturbers of peaceful life and social progress, by their noble determination to be subject to no law save that of their own fierce will, though all the world recognised this nobility as of the purest water and most genuine dye, yet, somehow or other, old Dame Nature, obstinately taking note only of his highness's manner of life, had got it into her stupid old head that he was not noble at all, but to a remarkable degree the reverse. Not that it would have signified a rush what Dame Nature, with her old-fashioned notions, might have thought about the matter, had it not been that she had unfortunately found the means of expressing her opinion so emphatically, that it was impossible not to be more or less annoyed by it. It was now fifty years

that she had been making up her mind as to the genuineness of the nobility of the most noble prince ; and she now announced her opinion on the subject to the world by fashioning him into the most hideously bloated caricature of the human form and face divine that a nightmare fancy could conceive. He was, we are told, so enormously fat, that his leg was as large round as an ordinary man's body. And one of these huge unnaturally bloated limbs was afflicted with a loathsome cancerous affection, named, we are told, by the science of that good old time, a "lupa," or she-wolf, because it was necessary continually to supply it with abundant applications of raw flesh, in order that, exerting on them its destroying power, it might so the more spare the living tissues of the noble patient's body. It might seem, on the whole, to the livers in a degenerate age, that these circumstances might also have weighed somewhat in the estimate of the prince as a bridegroom, formed by the young lady and her family. But they do not appear to have done so. And the facts have been preserved by the contemporary writers only as the envious talk of other Roman ladies, mothers and daughters, who would fain have secured the noble prince, lupa and all, for themselves.

Strange, is it not, to note how entirely changed our nineteenth century world is from a state of society in which noble matrons and damsels could be led by such feelings to indulge in such talk ! What do May Fair drawing-rooms care about the fifty years, or other drawbacks, of great catches in the matrimonial market, that have been already caught ? But Roman sixteenth-century saloons did, as it seems, find no little delectation in such considerations.

That other little circumstance of the removal of his first wife by the agency of his highness's own noble hands, though it was by no means felt to have cast any stain on the prince's fair fame as a knight and a gentleman, or to have rendered him generally on that account a less desirable family connexion, yet was one of the causes that, as prudent Count Accor-



amboni perceived, contributed to surround a marriage between his daughter and the prince with especial danger. For the first Princess Orsini, thus removed, was no other than Isabella dei Medici, the sister of Francis, the reigning Duke of Florence, and of the Cardinal Ferdinand dei Medici, one of the most powerful of the Sacred College. Now this poor Isabella had unhappily been led, by the total neglect of her noble husband, to requite his conduct to her, in such sort, as to make her death no less necessary to the honour of her "serene" and "most reverend" brothers, than to that of her husband. So much so, that the former, far from feeling any estrangement from their brother-in-law on that account, considered themselves beholden to him for his nice care for the reputation of the family. And, notwithstanding any little unpleasantness as to the manner of their dear departed sister's death, the duke and the cardinal would have felt that the "honour" of the Medici family was dreadfully compromised by their brother-in-law making so shocking a misalliance. And Count Accoramboni wisely considered that it might not pay in the long run to encounter such enmities, even to make his daughter Princess Orsini.

But no prudent considerations of this kind could induce his lady wife to give up the dear vision of becoming mother-in-law to a prince. Despite his fifty years, his infirmities, and his monstrous unwieldy person, she felt that a prince is a prince for a' that, and a' that, and twice as muckle's a' that. And the Orsini offer had, accordingly, her consistent and unflinching support.

As for the third proposals, perhaps it would have been better to say nothing about them, were it not for the paramount obligation to tell the truth, and, as far as in him lies, the whole truth, which is binding on whosoever presumes to meddle with history. Be as angry as you will, gentle reader, with the novelist who recounts to you what you had rather not hear. His business and duty is to please you. But do not blame a poor dealer with facts, who is forbidden by the

primary law of his duty to make things pleasant on all occasions, and who would fail in setting before you a true picture of any bygone state of society, if he shrank from telling you everything which is disagreeable in the telling.

Well, then, the beautiful Vittoria's third suitor was his eminence the most reverend sexagenarian Cardinal Bishop Farnese. Suitor? Proposals? Why, the old man was a priest irrevocably vowed to celibacy! Yes, indeed. That was unquestionably the state of the case. And yet his "proposals" had the energetic support of two of the brothers. What! when it has been just related how two other brothers, acting according to the ideas prevalent in that age, thought it necessary to connive at their fallen sister's murder, to purge the family of the disgrace brought on it by her fault! And these two Accoramboni brothers, too, were of "noble birth." But they were reprobate castaways then, these young Gubbio counts? Far from it! One of them, we are assured by a monk who has written a biography of Sixtus the Fifth, was "a young man of saintly morals," and was shortly afterwards made a bishop. And, doubtless, if proposals of the nature of those of his venerable eminence the Cardinal Farnese had come from any one of the same rank as the Accorambonis, the young brother of saintly morals would have duly resented them. That is the whole explanation of the matter. What but honour could accrue to an obscure provincial count's daughter and her family from any connexion with a cardinal and a Farnese?

Such were the principles avowed and recognised in the Roman world of the sixteenth century.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE BROTHERS-IN-LAW.

THUS Vittoria's three suitors had each their partisans in the family councils. The father was strong in favour of Francesco Peretti, the nephew of his uncle ; the mother was desperately bent on having " the sweet prince " ; and the brother of saintly morals was of opinion that most might be made out of the noble and reverend Farnese.

And what about the lovely maid herself ? Did she remain aloof and fancy-free while her elders were debating her destiny ? Did she take either side in the momentous question ? Did she tell one lover to " ask mamma," and the other to " speak to papa " ? Or, are we to suppose that she was looked upon by her parents as an article to be disposed of, and as having no voice in the matter ? If we could discover any hint that could indicate a preference on the young lady's part at this stage of the matter, it would help to throw a light upon some subsequent parts of the story. But no word of the sort is to be found.

In this position of matters Count Claudio, finding it hopeless to bring his wife over to his opinion, and thinking that delay might prove the most dangerous of all courses, determined to exert his authority as head of the family, and Vittoria was duly married to Francesco Peretti, to the great disgust of the exemplary old Cardinal Farnese, and to the rage and fury of the Duke of Bracciano—one of Orsini's titles, by which he is often called. To the last her mother protested, as one of the chroniclers writes, that, " for her part, she would not have preferred a future uncertain greatness for her daughter to princely grandeur present in the person of the prince, who was brother-in-law of another cardinal and prince, Ferdinando dei Medici."

Meanwhile, Vittoria was received into the Peretti family in

a manner, writes the historian, which ought to have contented and made the happiness of any woman. The old Cardinal di Montalto showed her every mark of affection. Though by no means rich, he did his utmost to satisfy all her tastes and caprices. The old monk, in the words of the chronicler, "even anticipated her womanish desires for ornaments, servants, pomp, dresses, jewels, and a coach," that then rare and much-coveted apex of fashionable luxury and ostentation. Her husband, we are assured, loved her "almost madly, and quite beyond what husbands are wont to feel for their wives." Donna Cammilla, Francesco Peretti's mother, and the cardinal's favourite sister, treated her with the greatest affection, and the old cardinal himself "seemed to study nothing else than to spy out her wishes, and satisfy them even before they were expressed, although they were often of a very costly nature."

Her family, too, began almost immediately to reap important advantages from the new connexion. Of her four brothers, two had favoured the wishes of his most noble and most reverend eminence the Cardinal Farnese; and the other two were of their mother's faction, warm supporters of Prince Orsini's wooing. But the winning candidate does not appear to have allowed any unkind feeling to have diminished the cordiality of his affection for his new brothers-in-law.

First, her eldest brother, Ottavio, the "young man of saintly morals," who had striven to make his sister the mistress of the sexagenarian priest, had to be provided for. He, as might, perhaps, have been guessed, had embraced the ecclesiastical career; and the pious and exemplary cardinal, his new uncle-in-law, lost no time in writing to the Duke of Urbino, who was their common sovereign (both Gubbio and Fermo, the Cardinal di Montalto's birthplace being in the territory of the Dukes of Urbino), to beg him to propose Ottavio Accoramboni to the Pope for a bishopric. He was accordingly made Bishop of Fossombroni almost immediately. Of course it was easier to make a churchman's fortune than

to find advancement for a layman ; almost all careers of the latter category requiring, more or less, *some* measure of capacity for being useful on the part of those who seek promotion in them. However, when the lovely Vittoria began to sigh about poor dear Giulio, her second brother, and to fret over his want of a position, the good uncle-in-law again put his shoulder to the wheel. He could not make Giulio a bishop, but he succeeded in inducing his eminence Cardinal Sforza to take him as his "gentleman of the chamber." It would seem that brother Giulio must have been of the Orsini faction in the matter of the wooing. But the benefits showered on the family by the unvindictive Perettis fell impartially on the supporters of either rival. The third brother, Flaminio, was a Farnese-ite. And that worthy old churchman, despite the natural disgust which he must have felt at the insulting rejection of his flattering offers to the Accoramboni family, seems to have charged himself with the fortunes of his zealous and faithful, though unsuccessful, supporter. The fourth brother still remained to be provided for ; and Vittoria did not disguise from herself that the peculiar circumstances of his case in some degree increased the difficulty of placing him in an independent and honourable position. The truth was, that Marcello Accoramboni had been "a little wild." He had, indeed, given himself to the culture of that noxious plant the *avena selvatica*, or wild oat, on such an extensive scale as to have attracted the notice of the police authorities, who had strongly recommended him to sow none of his favourite plant within the walls of Rome, and, indeed, as the surest motive of securing this result, had requested him not to favour that city with his presence until specially invited. In short, Marcello Accoramboni was a bandit ; and Vittoria did not venture to speak to the Cardinal di Montalto about him. The inexhaustible kindness, however, of her uncle-in-law extended itself even to this black sheep of the Accoramboni flock. Guessing all that his favourite nephew's beautiful bride would have asked if she had dared, the indulgent old

cardinal protected the scapegrace from the police, connived at his visits to Rome, and suffered him, when there, to find an inviolable asylum in his own sacred palace. "And it may fairly be said," remarks the cardinal's biographer, "that by saving this man's life, he was nurturing a snake in his bosom." From which strong language it would seem that Marcello Accoramboni's differences with the law had been of a serious nature. And further, from the protection against the law accorded to such an offender by one in the position of the highly-respected Cardinal di Montalto, who was designated by public opinion for the next successor to the chair of St. Peter, and who was sedulously nursing a reputation for goodness and respectability of all sorts, we may draw some noteworthy conclusions as to the general respect in which the law was then held in Rome, and the feeling of the society generally with regard to those who lived under its ban.

This fourth brother, Marcello the bandit, it must be observed, had been a violent supporter of Orsini's pretensions to his sister's hand.

And now it would seem that if ever a young wife had reason to be contented with her lot, Vittoria should have been so. All Rome thought so, and expressed their opinions volubly enough, especially all those Roman dames and damsels who "owed it to themselves to declare that they, for their parts, had never seen anything so very wonderful about the girl, and had always said so." And this debt to themselves they paid over and over again. For the favourite nephew of a cardinal, whom all the world fully expected to be the next pope, is a very important man in the Eternal City; and not even Roman prudence could prevent ladies' tongues from saying of him, and especially of his wife, what they owed to themselves to say.

Gregory the Thirteenth, meanwhile, was becoming visibly more and more infirm. And Vittoria's ultimate greatness seemed to be prosperously and rapidly ripening. If only, indeed, the Cardinal di Montalto should survive the reigning

pope. For the mild and gentle old man was, to all appearance, little less infirm than the man he was to succeed. As usual he was seen, though sadly bent by age and much troubled at times by his cough, assiduous at all his religious duties. In the consistorial meetings of the Sacred College, though constant in his attendance, and ever one of the first cardinals in his place, he took but little part in debate, having apparently no strong political opinions, and being anxious only about the punctual discharge of his own especial duties and devout practices. At mass and other public devotions he was seen constantly. And these devout exercises, it was evident, so called for the exertion of all the little strength and life he had in him, that if ever worldly schemes and ambitions had held any place in his chastened heart, they had long ago burned themselves out. As for the talk and schemes about raising him to the papacy, he would never take any part in them; and would reply to any mention of the subject only by a sad smile, and a gentle shake of the venerable old bent head, generally interrupted by a return of that distressing and ominous churchyard cough. What a pope for a nephew!

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WAY OF THE WORLD IN ROME.

ONE night, after the family of Francesco Peretti had retired, the household was disturbed by an impetuous knocking at the great door of the palace. And in a minute or two afterwards Catarina, the lady Vittoria's maid, came in great haste into the chamber of her master and mistress, and put a letter into the hands of the former. She supposed, she said, that it must be something of great importance, for it had been brought to the door in hot haste by Mancino, who had charged her to deliver it without a moment's delay to her

master, as any loss of time would be of disastrous consequence.

Now, the man who was known by this nickname of "Mancino"—the left-handed, in English—was one Dominico di Acquaviva, a bandit, whom Peretti and his uncle the cardinal protected by affording him sometimes an asylum, when hard pressed by the police. He was a Fermo man—a fellow-countryman of the Perettis—a circumstance quite sufficient, according to the ideas and feelings of that day, to account for their protecting him against the law.

Francesco's first impulse was to tell the man to come up, that he might ask him further about his mission. But he was told that the Mancino had gone off hurriedly as soon as ever he had given the letter. Francesco found that it was from his not too respectable brother-in-law, Marcello Accoramboni. It urged him to come to him forthwith to a certain spot on the Monte Cavallo, where he was waiting for him ; adding further, that his presence was needed on an affair of the utmost importance, and of the most secret nature, in which any delay would be fatal. Peretti does not seem to have hesitated a minute about doing as he was requested. He dressed himself in all haste, girded on a sword, and ordered one single servant to be ready to attend him with a torch. But, as he was about to leave the house, his mother Cammilla threw herself in his way, and implored him not to go forth at that hour of the night. Vittoria also joined her mother-in-law, and added her supplications to her young husband not to put himself into danger. Cammilla, poor mother, clung to his knees in the extremity of her anxiety to prevent her son from accepting the strange invitation. The presence of Vittoria prevented her from saying all that she might otherwise have urged, as to the character and habits of this bandit brother-in-law ; but she observed that such a step on his part was something wholly unprecedented, that he had never before had any such business in conjunction with her son as could give rise to such a demand for so untimely an inter-



view ; and finally, she declared that she had a presentiment of evil such as on former occasions had never deceived her—forgetting, poor soul, that the infallibility of her presentiment, if trusted, must make her supplication necessarily of no avail. In support of the reasonableness of her fears, she entreated him to remember, says the chronicler, “the extreme indulgence of the times” ; by which she meant the utter relaxation of all law and order, which made it unsafe for any man to traverse the streets of Rome after nightfall.

Francesco, however, was not to be deterred from doing as he proposed. No danger, he said, should prevent him from treating the brother of his adored Vittoria as his own, so he broke away from the weeping women, and went forth into the streets with one man bearing a torch before him. But the unhappy mother, clinging yet to the possibility of frustrating her infallible presentiment, as a last effort rushed after him, and catching him by his cloak flying in the night-wind, hurriedly poured into his ear all the grounds for misgiving that the poor woman could not bring herself to speak out before her daughter-in-law. Was not this union of two such men as Marcello Accoramboni and the Mancino ominous of evil, both bandits, and both men stained with blood, as they were ? For what good or lawful purpose could two such men want him in the streets of Rome at that hour of the night ? Why had the Mancino, the bringer of this fatal letter, gone off in such a hurry, avoiding all questioning ? If Marcello had been in need of defence from immediate danger, would he have sent away from him a man carrying arms, and accustomed to the use of them, like the Mancino ? But all these arguments, urged with the hot eloquence of affection and alarm, were fruitless. Ashamed, perhaps, of going back to his wife and telling her that he had thought better of facing those dangers she had told him of, and had decided on leaving her brother to his fate, he resisted all poor Camilla’s entreaties, and hurried on his way.

He had reached the Monte Cavallo, and was near the top

of the ascent, when three shots from an arquebuse were heard, and Peretti fell mortally wounded. In the next instant, four bravoës rushed up to the body and made sure of their work by repeated stabs with their daggers. The servant with the torch fled, and carried to the wife and mother the news of the fulfilment of that presentiment which the latter had been expressing to him only a few minutes before.

Of course the rest of the night passed in the murdered man's house in distracted lamentation. Vittoria vied with her mother-in-law in the violence and bitterness of her grief. But with early morning arrived the Cardinal di Montalto. The loss of his nephew was probably more severe than that sustained by either the widow or the childless mother. Those who do not know what the pride of family, and the desire of establishing a name and a race is in an Italian breast, will hardly understand how this should be so. They cannot tell what a nephew is to an ambitious churchman. Yet the old man entered the house with his accustomed grave calmness. He bade the women restrain the violence of their feelings, and cease to deplore the irrevocable. He caused the mangled body to be brought in from the public way where the murderers had left it, and prepared for its decent and seemly burial. "Such was the influence of his authority," writes the previously quoted chronicler, "that during the whole preparations and celebration of the funeral, nothing was heard from those women, or seen in their manner, other than what is seen in the case of ordinary deaths in well-regulated and wisely-disciplined families."

It chanced that a consistory of cardinals had been appointed for the very next day after Francesco Peretti's murder. All Rome was of course talking of the deed; not simply of the fact that a man had been murdered on the Monte Cavallo during the past night—that was far too common an occurrence to excite much notice—but that the favourite nephew of the man, who it was universally expected would be pope, had been murdered; and that, as everybody at once suspected

and cautiously whispered, by one of the most powerful nobles in Rome. For there seems to have been but little doubt in the public mind, from the first, that Prince Paolo Giordano Orsini, Duke of Bracciano, was the author of his rival's death.

A curious feature, recurring again and again in every page of mediæval and modern Roman history, and strongly marked to the present day in the social aspects of the Eternal City, is a continual watchfulness, and cunning subtle deduction from it, and the corresponding equally vigilant care to elude it. The minute circumstances and acts which are meditated and commented on, and the diplomatic caution with which those whose position draws men's eyes on them act in every detail of life, surprise the observer who belongs to a state of society constituted on different principles. He generally explains the phenomenon by attributing it to the simple frivolity of a people who have no larger interests to employ their thoughts. But the true explanation lies deeper among the fundamental principles of the Roman social system. The small matters thus spied out, on the one hand, and hidden on the other, are of real importance in a society governed by privilege instead of by law. In proportion as law is weak, and privilege powerful, individual will, character, and caprice become important. The cardinal has a nephew, and the nephew has a secretary, and the secretary has a fair friend, and the fair friend has a favourite maid, and the favourite maid has a lover, and the lover has a cousin, and the cousin may sell apples at the street corner, perhaps. The apple-seller has in the all-destructive and demoralizing hierarchy of privilege a certain amount of power as against some other poor devil less "protected" than himself. In every despotism the despot will be keenly watched by those subjected to his power. Cunning watchfulness is the natural arm of the unprotected weak against the unrestrained strong. But in Rome an altogether special perfection of cunning, hypocrisy, and guile is generated by the peculiarity of the circumstances that lead

the great objects of spying watchfulness to be constantly on their guard against it, and to elude and delude it by unsleeping caution and secrecy. The lay despot of any other social system is studied and watched, but has rarely any such object before him as to make him care much to avoid the scrutiny. Every cardinal is living with a view to the papacy, if not absolutely in his own person, in that of the leading man of his party, whose success is all-important to him. Hence every attempt to spy out the secret of a real emotion, to obtain a glimpse of the true desire or intention, to peer through some crevice in the screen of dissimulation and caution, is met by these cynosures of Roman eyes by a trained and practised secretiveness, which has thus, under the specious name of prudence, become one of the most admired and cultivated of accomplishments.

All Rome was thus on the watch, therefore, for some slip of bad play on the part of the Cardinal di Montalto, which might afford a momentary view of the cards he held, and a shrewd guess at his game.

Certainly, the chance was a rare one. Everybody knew how wrapped up the old man was in the nephew who had been thus taken from him. It was impossible to doubt the severity of the blow. It was almost equally impossible to doubt that the cardinal must have pretty well known what hand had struck it. The world of Rome felt little or no doubt that the formidable Duke of Bracciano was the murderer, if not by his own hand, by that of his hired assassins. Here, then, was a rare opportunity of observing the character and tendencies of the man who was expected to be shortly pope. Would grief and natural indignation be allowed to have their natural course? Would the future pope throw down the gauntlet to the most powerful and audacious subject in Rome?

## CHAPTER V

## LEAST SAID SOONEST MENDED.

Nor a cardinal in all Rome was more scrupulously punctual in his attendance at all consistorial and other meetings than the old and infirm Cardinal di Montalto. He was noted for being almost always the first, or among the first, to enter the hall of meeting. But it was universally thought that on this occasion he would absent himself from the unlucky inopportune assembly. His much-loved nephew, the prop of his old age, the hope of his ambition, who alone could have made the triple crown, in any worldly point of view, worth having to him, was lying a yet unburied mangled corpse in the house of mourning he must leave to attend the conference. He must quit his desolate sister in her sorrow, and leave alone with the dead the weeping women whom his presence and authority alone had restrained from abandoning themselves to all the excesses of hysterical emotion. But it was not so much the painful effort necessary for tearing himself from this sad scene to present himself in his place at the Consistory, that led people to whisper to each other that old Montalto would never be able to be at that day's meeting; it was the thought that surely, under such circumstances, he would not venture to meet the prying eyes of the public, and especially of his peers of the Sacred College. Human infirmity, it was thought, could hardly in such a case attain to that perfect suppression of all emotion, that impassable and inscrutable demeanour of features, voice, and manner, which it was, as a manner of course, considered that policy and prudence in such a case demanded. What was it the old man had to conceal? Was he not to be supposed to grieve over his nephew's untimely death! He was to conceal *everything* he felt on *any* subject. It was the traditional rule of

conduct so universal, received from generation to generation, as to have become instinctive in the Roman nature. *Something* might gleam out from the inner hidden soul of the man in the weak moment of deep affliction ; *some* feeling which might be made the basis of carefully-reasoned theories as to the inscrutable old man's real thoughts and desires ! We are told of profound comparative anatomists who, from the sight of the small fragment of an antediluvian fossil skeleton, can determine the structure of the entire organization. And the cunning moral anatomists of Rome ask only a momentary flash of real emotion to construct from it a whole theory of probable human character and intentions. This was the ordeal to which it was thought that the heavily-stricken Cardinal di Montalto would not venture to expose himself.

All Rome was wrong. Punctual at the appointed hour, with bent body and tottering step, as usual, but not one iota more so than usual, and with his wonted calmly-benignant but wholly impassible expression of features, the old man walked, one of the first to arrive, as ever, into the hall of meeting.

Of course every eye was on him, striving in vain to penetrate below that unruffled surface to the tumultuous movements which they thought must needs be raging beneath it. Then, one after another, their eminences advanced to condole with him on his misfortune. Just as in an exhibition of animal magnetism, the spectators attempt to satisfy themselves of the genuineness of the patient's insensibility by poking, pricking, and pinching him in every sensitive part, so the curious witnesses of this exhibition of stoicism proceeded to test the perfection of it by the closest scrutiny of the performer under the scalpel of their compassion and sympathy. But, to the admiration of all present, no shadow of failing under the ordeal rewarded the vigilance of the observers. With affectionate thanks to each for their kind sympathy, the old man replied to one, that in this world such misfortunes must be looked for, that history was full of such ; to another,

that excessive grief for the irremediable was but blameable weakness ; and reminded a third that David, the man after God's own heart, had arisen and washed his face when his child was finally taken from him.

The most accomplished and practised members of the court, writes an historian, attributed this immobility of his to an affectation of the stoic courage of Brutus and Cato ; but the wise judged that "without true Christian virtue it was impossible to feign to such perfection !" So that the capacity for dissimulation so much admired by Rome, was actually erected by it into "a Christian virtue !"

When Gregory, the octogenarian pope, entered the Consistory, "the first thing he did," says the chronicler, "was to fix his eyes on the Cardinal di Montalto, and burst into tears." But Peretti remained to all appearance unmoved. And when it came to his turn to approach the pope for the transaction of business connected with the offices he held, and the pope, again giving away to tears, condoled with him, and promised him that every effort should be made to discover the murderers, and bring them to condign punishment, the cardinal, humbly thanking his Holiness for his sympathy, besought him to make no further inquiry into the matter, lest many who were innocent might be made miserable by another's crime. For his own part, he assured the pope, that, from the bottom of his heart, he pardoned whosoever had done the deed. And thus saying, he passed on to speak, with imperturbable calm, of the ordinary business in hand.

It is curious to observe, in all this, the total ignorance manifested by all parties concerned, and by the historians who narrate the facts, of the most elementary notions of the duties and functions of civil government.

The pope, we are told, expressed the utmost astonishment, on quitting the Consistory, at the Cardinal di Montalto's admirable self-possession ; and, in talking to his nephew, the Cardinal di San Sisto, said, shaking his head, "Truly that man is a great friar !"

But the poor Cardinal had to undergo yet another severe ordeal. Roman etiquette required that all the great personages of the city, lay as well as ecclesiastic, should severally visit him to condole with him on his loss. Among the rest Prince Orsini would, of course, have to discharge this ceremonial obligation. Information had been carefully obtained when this trying visit was to be paid, and at the time named for it the receiving-room and antechamber of the cardinal were filled to overflowing with prelates and others, who, on one pretence or another, had gone thither, "every one of them," says the historian, "with the deliberate purpose of minutely observing the first meeting of those two faces, judging that the Cardinal would scarcely succeed in hiding, at least at the first moment of meeting, some slight alteration of countenance." But the reverend and illustrious concourse of spies were disappointed; for Montalto received the prince with his usual suavity of manner and cheerful countenance, and discoursed with him on indifferent subjects as he had often done before. So that Orsini, on leaving him, "said laughingly to his companions, as he got into his carriage, 'Faith, it is true enough that the old fellow is a very great friar!'"

It is worth observing that these reiterated testimonies to the old Cardinal's consummate mastery of the art of dissimulation are triumphantly related by his biographer, a monk of his own order, as bright gems in the coronet of virtues with which he crowns his hero. And he assures us, moreover, that the circumstances of this tragic affair, which in less masterly hands might easily have turned to the considerable injury of his chances of the papacy, were, by his consummate skill, so managed as to materially strengthen them. "For," said the cardinals to themselves, "evidently this man, either by nature cannot, or from policy will not, do injury to any one however grievously he may be offended."

In the mean time his liberal conduct to Vittoria also won him golden opinions in all quarters. The young widow had to return to her father's house, and might have been sent



back as empty-handed as she had come from it. But Montalto made her a present of all the gold and silver plate, the costly dresses and jewels, which he and her late husband had purchased for her.

While Rome was still admiring this liberality, and within a very few days after the murder, the attention of the city was excited, and the feelings of the cardinal outraged anew, by the news that Vittoria and her mother had left their home, and sought shelter in the palace of Prince Orsini. The gross indecency and audacity of such a step seems irreconcilable with any other supposition than that they were both guilty accomplices in the murder of Peretti. It was said that they sought in the palace of Orsini, which was inviolable by the police, an asylum from any pursuits which might be directed against them on account of Peretti's death. And the action of the executive authorities in such matters was so little regulated by reason and justice, was so arbitrary and uncertain, at one moment inflicting the most violent punishments without a shadow of real evidence against the accused, and at another permitting the most notorious crimes to remain unnoticed, that the mere circumstance of persons, however innocently connected by chance of time and place with any crime, seeking to put themselves out of the way of the officers of justice, was no presumption of their guilt. But the Cardinal di Montalto was abundantly able to have protected Vittoria and her mother in these circumstances if they had needed it. And, again, why had her mother more cause to fear the pursuit of the police than her father? But, in any case, it is impossible not to feel that the roof of the Prince Orsini ought to have been, under the circumstances, the very last in Rome to which Vittoria should have had recourse.

Rome heard without surprise, though not without much disgust, that a marriage was forthwith to take place between Prince Orsini, Duke of Bracciano, and Vittoria Accoramboni. But, in the mean time, the officers of justice, stimulated, it would seem, by the extraordinary character of the circum-

stances, had, despite the Cardinal di Montalto's desire to the contrary, commenced a more than usually active investigation into the murder. The bargello succeeded in capturing the Mancino. And on his second examination, on the 24th of February, 1582, "without the application of torture," this man confessed that the murder had been plotted by the mother of Vittoria and the maid Catarina, and had been committed by some free lances in the employ of a certain noble, "whose name is, for good and sufficient reasons, not recorded." Such are the words of the legal record, as quoted by the historian. Catarina, the maid, had been sent to the safe refuge of Orsini's feudal hold at Bracciano. This woman, according to some of the accounts of the story, was the sister of the bandit Mancino.

Very little mystery, therefore, seems to hang about the main points of the story. The Countess Accoramboni had never given up her ambitious hope of seeing her daughter the wife of one of Rome's greatest nobles, whose first consort had been a sovereign princess. Her bandit son Marcello, who had been equally anxious for the marriage of his sister with the chief of the great Orsini family, had, in conjunction with his mother, determined that the marriage with Peretti, brought about by his father, should not frustrate their hopes and plans; and the noble suitor himself, who had with his own hands disembarrassed himself of his first wife, and who had no lack of men at his beck, perfectly ready to do any deed of blood he might command them, had, without any difficulty, as we may well suppose, fallen in with their views as to the best method of attaining the object of his wishes. The murder was, there can be no question, concocted by the Signora Accoramboni, her son Marcello, and Prince Paolo Giordano Orsini. But it is upon the cards—just upon the cards—that Vittoria herself may not have had any guilty knowledge of the plot. It is true, she is recorded to have joined her mother-in-law in imploring her husband not to go out on the fatal expedition which led him to his murderers.

True, also, that she composed an elegy on his fate, still extant, in very unexceptionable Petrarchian verse. But the entreaties of a young wife to a young husband not to expose himself to personal danger for the sake of succouring her brother, might very easily, as everybody can understand, be so shaped as to act as so many incitements to him to meet the peril. And as for the Petrarchian elegy, if, as there is reason to suppose, it gave no umbrage to the noble Orsini, we can hardly be justified in attributing to it any great weight as an exposition of her genuine sentiments. On the other hand, there is the damning fact of her all but immediate residence in the house of the man whom all Rome *knew*, it may be said, to be the murderer of her husband. Even supposing that Orsini and her mother succeeded in persuading her that he was innocent of any connexion with the crime, still the suspicion, however erroneous, which attached to him, ought to have made it impossible for her to think of availing herself of such an asylum.

The judicial investigation, as has been said, had succeeded in obtaining evidence against the Accorambonis, mother and son, and against a prince whose name the police records were afraid to mention. But with this information Justice contented herself. No further steps were taken in the matter, at the urgent request of the Cardinal di Montalto. The Mancino was released from prison, and sent away to his own native village, with the intimation that his life would be forfeited if he left it without express permission from Rome. And thus far all was decorously wiped up; and the disagreeables were confined to the unlucky Peretti, who had lost his life—not altogether without affording by his death a useful social example—for having dared to marry one who was desired by a Roman prince; and to his poor mother and uncle, who had philosophy enough to remark that such things must be expected in this world. But still all was not quite satisfactorily settled. The Duke of Bracciano had publicly announced his intention of forthwith marrying the lovely widow, who

had so confidently flown to his protection. For the strong disapprobation of all the great Orsini clan of such a match the powerful head of the house seems to have cared little. But there were other and more powerful personages, as has been already observed, to whom such a marriage was exceedingly distasteful. The Medici conceived that the lustre of their name would be tarnished by the misalliance of one who had once been connected by marriage with their own race. And the two brothers of the ill-starred Isabella, the Duke of Florence and the cardinal, thought it hard that, after having connived at the murder of their sister for the sake of preserving immaculate the fair fame of both the Medici and Orsini name, their partner in the enterprise should now spoil all by this degrading alliance. The Cardinal de' Medici, therefore, and the Spanish ambassador, whose master fully entered into the feelings of his friend and ally, the Duke of Florence, on this subject, went together to Pope Gregory, and besought him to prevent so great a scandal as the intended marriage. The pope found it impossible to refuse two such applicants, and he accordingly issued his precept to Orsini to contract no such marriage without express licence from him, or, after his death, from his successor. Moreover, as papal precepts addressed to an Orsini were not always very sure of meeting with obedience, to make all sure, he shut up Vittoria in the castle of St. Angelo.

The Medici had insisted to the pope on the "scandal" of the marriage they wished to prevent. And scandalous enough such a marriage would assuredly have been under the circumstances of the case. But it is worth remarking, that the only ground of scandal thought of or mentioned was the inequality of birth between the parties. And the papal prohibition was based on this ground alone.

As is usual with them, the old historians who have left us the record of the facts of this strange story are very chary in the matter of dates. But with regard to this imprisonment of Vittoria, they do furnish us with a couple of them.

She was sent to Saint Angelo in January, 1583, and remained there till the 10th of April, 1585. The latter day there was no mistaking, as it was one of the great epochs of Roman history. On the 10th of April, 1585, died Pope Gregory the Thirteenth.

## CHAPTER VI.

### LOOKING FOR ST. PETER'S KEYS, AND FINDING THEM.

THE reader of papal history is often struck by the extreme swiftness with which the acts of a pope are undone and reversed as soon as ever the breath is out of his body. It is like the action of a spring, which flies back to its original form and position instantly on the removal of the force which has compressed it. This, again, is one of the consequences and evidences of a state of society governed not by law, but by personal interest, favour, and privilege. Power passes, from top to bottom of the social scale, into new hands, and, as a natural and recognised consequence, it is wielded with quite different objects, is directed to a new set of aims, and made to subserve a new system of interests and passions.

It was quite in accordance, therefore, with the ordinary march of events in the Roman world, that Vittoria Accoramboni should be restored to liberty on the death of the pope who had imprisoned her. A powerful friend was no doubt on the watch to take instant advantage of the opportunity; for, though more than two years had elapsed since the gates of St. Angelo had closed upon her—a terribly long trial for the constancy of a swain of more than fifty years, and half as many stone, whose physicians shook their heads, as they redoubled their applications of raw flesh to his diseased limbs—her Orsini still was true; and on the very same day that ended the old pope's life, she walked forth from her prison, and returned to his protection.

Still, however, there remained considerable difficulties in

the way of the marriage. The prohibition pronounced against it by Gregory the Thirteenth had been especially extended beyond his own lifetime; and the penalty pronounced in case of disobedience was that of being considered in open rebellion to the Holy See. Now, though a position of open rebellion against the sovereign was nothing new to an Orsini, and Prince Paolo Giordano was by no means likely to be definitely deterred from doing that on which his heart was set by the threat of it, yet it was a sufficiently serious matter to make it very desirable that, if possible, he should attain his object without incurring it. Again, in case the Cardinal di Montalto should be elected pope, as all Rome supposed he would be, it was natural to suppose that he would be little inclined to permit the marriage which his predecessor had forbidden. The object of the prince, therefore, was to obtain a juridical opinion to the effect that Gregory's prohibition ceased to have force after his death; and then to celebrate the marriage before the next pope should be elected.

The intervals between the end of one pope's reign and the beginning of that of his successor were always times of extra licence, turbulence, violence, and lawlessness. And many things were done during these interregnums which, bad as the papal government was at all times, would not have been done while the chair of St. Peter was occupied. And these frequently-recurring periods of all but total anarchy varied, of course, in duration, according to the amount of difficulty experienced and time consumed by the cardinals in coming to such a degree of agreement as was necessary for the election of a new pope. In the present case, Orsini flattered himself that he should have plenty of time to accomplish his marriage before the conclave could come to an election. For though it was very generally believed that Montalto would be pope, it was perfectly well understood that this result would only be brought about as a compromise between strong parties in the conclave, each sufficiently powerful to

prevent their opponents' success, but not able to elect their own candidate. It was thought, therefore, that the election of Cardinal di Montalto would not be decided on until after there had been a certain amount of struggle and trying of their respective strength by the opposing factions.

Orsini's first step was not a difficult one. Theologians of respectable standing were readily found who declared that the prohibition was valid only during the reign of the pope who pronounced it. It might probably have been less easy to find canonists willing to support the opposite opinion while there was no pope on the throne, and an Orsini wished for a contrary decision. Still the law required that Vittoria's nearest relations should consent to the marriage. It would seem that her father must have died during the interval that had elapsed since her marriage with Peretti; for we do not hear of any application having been made to him, but to her brothers, who, after their father's death, were, for this purpose, their sister's legal guardians. The consent of the three younger brothers appears to have been obtained without any difficulty; but the elder, the young man of saintly morals, who had become Bishop of Fossombrone, absolutely refused to permit the match.

This hitch in the accomplishment of his object seems to have given Orsini more trouble than it might have been supposed he would have permitted it to do. The spectacle of the great chieftain of the house of Orsini waiting, and waiting in vain, for the consent to his marriage of the low-born bishop of an obscure little town in the Umbrian Apennines, seems strange to us, and must, one would think, have seemed something more than strange to the noble lover. And this consideration suggests the probability that his anxiety that all should be done with scrupulous legality may have been due rather to the lady, or to that superior and managing woman, her mother, on her behalf. When young ladies just out of their teens marry infirm old nobles of fifty, they are apt to evince a much more lively respect for, and interest in, law and its pro-

visions, than might be expected from the giddiness natural to their age and sex.

But from whatever quarter proceeded this unusual stickling for legality, certain it is that the anxious couple spared no pains to attain it. But that troublesome brother with his saintly morals was immovable. Whether it were that the holy man had never got over his discomfiture in his scheme of disposing of his sister to that pillar of the Church, the most reverend Cardinal Farnese, or whether, as a bishop, he was especially afraid of doing what might naturally be supposed to be most offensive to the man who would in all probability be pope in a few days, it is certain that no instances could obtain from him the desired consent. And the conclave was sitting all this while—and it was a long journey from Rome to Fossombrone—and precious time was being lost. The conclave might declare their election any day; and Vittoria might be marched back again to St. Angelo as quickly after the election of the new pope as she had escaped from it after the death of the old one. It was determined, however, to try one more urgent appeal to the obstinate bishop-brother, and a courier was despatched, we are told, on relays of horses, with orders to spare neither horse nor man for the bringing back an answer with the utmost speed.

In the mean time, however, the conclave of cardinals had been getting on with their work, and had arrived at the conclusion that the best compromise to be made between the contending parties was the election of the infirm Cardinal di Montalto, who was sure not to last long, sooner than had been expected. The old pope had died on the 14th of April, and on the 24th it was known that the election was made. The courier from Fossombrone had not returned, and Vittoria and her prince felt that, legal or not legal, it was now or never the moment for their marriage. There was not an instant to be lost, and the wedding was solemnized on the very same day that the Cardinal di Montalto was proclaimed pope by the name of Sixtus the Fifth.



Nothing could have been more insulting to the new pope than this marriage; performed, as if in defiance of him, at the very moment it was known that he was the new sovereign. It was as if the parties to it had hesitated to fly in the face of the late pope's prohibition as long as they feared the possibility of the election of some strong-handed and energetic ruler, and had only ventured on defying him when they were assured that they would have to deal with the weak and all-but imbecile Cardinal di Montalto. But though deeply offended at the manner in which the thing had been done, it is probable that the old man was not much surprised to find, when he came out from the conclave, that Orsini and his niece-in-law have availed themselves of the licence of an interregnum to effect what it was notorious that they desired.

But if Pope Sixtus was not surprised, a very great and by no means agreeable surprise awaited the Prince Orsini, in common with all the rest of the Eternal City.

The transformation of a cardinal into a pope is, in all cases, a great and remarkable one, watched, canvassed, and speculated on with intense interest by the court and city of Rome, and indeed, in those days, by the whole of Christendom. But never had such a transformation been seen as that which struck all Rome mute with astonishment, and half of it with terror, when the weak and meek old Mendicant friar Felix Peretti came forth from the conclave as Sixtus the Fifth. Upright as an arrow, imperious and dignified in gesture and bearing, firm of step and keen of eye, the new pope advanced to the altar to celebrate the service which is a pope's first duty, and pronounced the sacred words in strong ringing tones, which came from as sound a chest as any man that heard him could boast. The tottering gait, the bent body, the distressing cough, the downcast eye, the humble bearing, had all vanished as by magic. The astonished cardinals quailed before the power they had created, as Frankenstein before the being he had called to life. The deed was irrevocable. But probably there was not a single cardinal there

who would not have given much to undo what had been done. Nothing, of course, remained but to bend the head with such humility as they might to a ruler who evidently intended to rule them in earnest. The congratulations and obeisances had to be made, and were made humbly, to the peasant's son by Estes, Farneses, Savellis, and all the greatest and proudest names in Rome. The Cardinal de' Medici only, as is recorded, ventured, in offering his congratulations, to slide among them some word of remark on the wondrously restorative power which, by God's blessing, the papal consecration had exercised on his Holiness.

"Truly," replied Sixtus, "I have been many years looking for the keys of St. Peter, and had to keep my eyes on the earth to find them. Having found them, I can raise my eyes to heaven, henceforward to look earthwards no more."

However alarmed and disgusted Rome was, at the promise of vigour and strong-handed government in the new sovereign, the Roman world could not refuse its praise and admiration of the skilful and consistent hypocrisy of years, which had worked to so successful a result. And we, while branding as it deserves so base and degrading a system of ethics, and abominating the social system which generates and fosters it, must needs admit that the consummate hypocrite—the "great friar," as old Gregory admiringly called him—governed Rome and his states to better purpose than any pope since. Justice was, if severely, at least equitably exercised. The peasant's son quailed before none of the turbulent feudatories, who had been the terror of preceding popes. Rome, to its infinite surprise, became peaceable and safe. The brigands and bandits were mercilessly extirpated. The roads were no longer dangerous to property and life. And malefactors, and lawless men of all ranks, found that the States of the Pope, instead of being, as hitherto, their own special refuge and territory, were the least safe abiding-place for them in all Italy.

Paolo Giordano Orsini was not among the least thunder-

struck at the new character in which Sixtus the Fifth showed himself. Besides that the entire course of his life and habits were such as to render any strong and vigorous occupant of St. Peter's chair especially obnoxious to him, he had the consciousness of having first deeply injured the pope in the most cruel manner, and then recently insulted him by a most audacious defiance of his authority. It was with no easy mind, therefore, that the prince presented himself at the first general reception, when all the lay and ecclesiastical notabilities of Rome went to kiss the foot of their new sovereign. He had counted on observing narrowly the pope's manner to him when he should, in his turn, kneel before him, and say his few words of compliment, and judging thence how far Rome might be a safe home for him for the future. Sixtus showed no sign of anger, but he made no word of answer to Orsini's address. The omen was considered rather a discouraging one. It reminds one of the showman, who, when his head was in the lion's mouth, said, "If he wags his tail I am a lost man." Orsini thought that the pope had for a moment glanced sternly at him; and there was an anxious consideration whether this glance was to be deemed equivalent to the wag of the lion's tail. It was decided that the omen was not sufficiently clear; and the prince determined on learning with greater certainty what he had to expect from the new pope, before he made up his mind as to his own line of conduct.

He made application, therefore, for a private audience, which was at once granted him; and on an appointed day, having, as the historians tell us, learned by heart the speech he meant to address to the pope, he presented himself for the third time before the old man whose nephew he had murdered, and who knew that he was the murderer, while on his part Orsini was perfectly aware that he knew it. The interview must have been one which a student of human character and passions would have liked (safely ensconced out of harm's way behind some curtain in the audience chamber) to have witnessed. We

must picture to ourselves Sextus, upright and rigid, on his seat of state, somewhat stern of eye and feature, but calm, impassible, perfectly self-possessed, and utterly inscrutable, in his unimpassioned gravity. The unwieldy monster of bloated corpulence before him performs the ceremonial kiss on the sacred slipper, as we may well suppose, with scarcely less physical trouble and difficulty than mental scorn and rebellious pride. The arrogant and lawless ruffian noble stands cowed before the stern old man, and begins, not without visible signs of being ill at ease, his crammed speech.

He congratulated Sixtus on having attained a dignity which, &c., &c., prosperity of the time, pride of Rome, and happiness of the entire world, &c., &c.

Sixtus sat silent, and made no sign.

Orsini was forced to recommence, and this time congratulated *himself* on the happiness of living under so gracious, so clement, and worthy a sovereign.

Still the pope neither moved a muscle nor breathed a sound.

The culprit's mind misgave him more and more. He became evidently disconcerted, and, as the historian writes, "his tongue vacillated." Yet it was impossible to stand silent while that cold, grave eye was bent upon him, as waiting to hear the real business on which he had sought an audience, and he essayed to falter something about offering himself and all his power and influence to his sovereign.

Then at length Sixtus spoke.

"What your deeds have been," he said, "to me and mine, Duke of Bracciano, your own conscience is now telling you, quite as well as I could do. But reassure yourself! That which has been done against Francesco Peretti, or against Felix, Cardinal di Montalto, I pardon you, as fully and as surely as I warn you to hope for no pardon for aught which shall henceforward be done against Sixtus. Go, clear your house and your estates of the lawless followers and bandits that you feed and give asylum to. Go! and obey!"

The last words were accompanied by one of those terrible lightning glances which all the historians of this remarkable man speak of as having had power to make the stoutest heart quail. The haughtiest and most masterful of Rome's lawless barons slunk from the Mendicant monk's presence like a whipped cur.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A WEDDING EXCURSION.

THE remark of one of the biographers of Sixtus—the monk Tempesti—on the conduct of the pope towards Orsini, is too curiously illustrative of the moral sense and notions of the time to be passed over. The disobedience of the prince to the precept forbidding him to marry Vittoria, would have afforded, says the monk, an excellent opportunity of taking vengeance for the murder of Peretti. But, having pardoned the first offence when cardinal, Sixtus did not like immediately to punish the second as pope. He, *therefore*, intimated to him the order to send away his bandit followers, so that if he disobeyed this command “this fault might serve as an opportunity of punishing the first most heinous offence. *A sentiment truly worthy and princely!*”

The general course of the conduct and administration of Sixtus, however, were such as to justify us in believing that his sentiments were less princely than his admiring biographer supposes on this occasion. There seems no reason to doubt that he absolutely spoke sincerely, and meant what he said, intending to let bygones be bygones, and to act no more severely towards Orsini, in the matter of the bandits kept in pay by him, than he did to all the other ruffian nobles of Rome on the same subject.

It never seems, however, to have occurred to Orsini for an instant that the pope meant nothing more than what he said. That glance from the eye of the man whose kinsman he had

murdered seemed to him quite a sufficient assurance that Rome was no longer any place for him. Perhaps, also, he felt no desire to inhabit a city in which law and order were henceforth to be paramount. So he came from the presence of Sixtus, and told Vittoria that they must seek a home elsewhere. She, on her part, was ready enough to turn her back on Rome, for Rome was beginning, we are told, to turn its back on her. Not by any means, it must be understood, because it was felt that her conduct had been base, unwomanly, or criminal, but because it had been *imprudent*, and wanting in sagacity and judgment. "There is no telling," says the historian, "the tittle-tattle and gossip of the Roman ladies about her. One of them, a person of high rank, who had at first been very fond of her, could not refrain from saying, disdainfully, 'See, now, what that silly fool Vittoria has done for herself! She might have been the first princess in Rome; and she has taken for a husband a living gangrene, full of sores, and fifty years old!'"

It is worth noting that to be the wife of a pope's favourite nephew, even though pope and nephew be peasant born, is evidently deemed by the Roman dames of rank a higher position than to be wife to the proudest and most powerful lay baron in Italy. And in a society far too corrupt to recognise honourableness as anything different from profit and power, or to estimate it except in proportion to its productiveness of these, the examples of the Riarcis, the Borgias, and the Farnesi, abundantly justified the correctness of their appreciation. Vittoria's mother, it may be said, was of a different opinion. But the choice before her was not between Orsini and a pope's nephew, but between the latter and one who might, or who possibly might never, become the former. It is further very noticeable that the lady of rank who calls Vittoria "a silly fool"—(*matta*)—for having played her cards as she had done, evidently takes it for granted that she was a consenting party to the murder of her first husband, inasmuch as on no other supposition could it be said that she

might have been, as Francesco Peretti's wife, the greatest princess in Rome.

It was about the middle of June, 1585, not quite two months after the election of Sixtus, that Orsini and his wife left Rome. A pretext for their departure—for such a step could not with any decorum be taken by such a personage in those days without a false reason to hide the true one—was found in the recommendation of his physicians that he should try certain mineral waters in the neighbourhood of the Lago di Garda for his health.

Vittoria and her husband were accompanied on their journey by that Ludovico Orsini, of whose dealings with the peace officers of the city the reader has already heard. He, too, as may readily be imagined, found Rome under Sixtus the Fifth no longer a desirable residence. Things were not as they were. The good old times, when a gentleman could live like a gentleman, were gone. Rome was going to the dogs, and he, for his part, did not know what things were coming to. We have heard similar grumblings under similar circumstances, with a similar impression of the accurate truth of the last of the complainer's assertions.

This Ludovico, who had thus fallen on bad times, was a cousin of the prince; and being, as we have seen, a gentleman of high and nice feelings when the honour of the family was in question, had been grievously pained and offended by the misalliance made by the head of his race. The enmity arising from this circumstance was, with that chivalrous sense of justice and fairness which is ever found united with the feelings that moved Ludovico, exhibited by him, not towards the powerful and wealthy head of his house, who "had been bewitched, poor fellow!" but wholly against Vittoria, the bewitching. So that, for her, at least, this addition to the family travelling party did not promise to alleviate any of the disagreeable circumstances which necessarily attached to it.

Bearing in mind what journeys were in those days, under the best circumstances, one may fancy that Vittoria, with her

diseased and shockingly unwieldy husband, and the hostile kinsman, who hated her as the cause not only of disgrace to his family, but of this exile from their homes in the world's capital, did not much enjoy her "bridal trip." We are inclined to be decidedly of the opinion of the Roman lady of rank, and to think that there was nothing, at all events yet, to repay one for murdering a husband.

It was in the territory of Venice that Orsini had determined on seeking a safe asylum and a home. There had been a connexion of long standing between the government of the great republic and the Orsini family, more than one of the name having held command of the forces of the Queen of the Adriatic. And when at length the travellers had arrived within a short distance of the city, the Senate sent messengers to offer Orsini a guard of honour, and a public entry into the city. This, however, the prince declined; and thinking, probably, that, under all the circumstances, the less of publicity attending his movements the better, he determined on not going to Venice at all. Turning his steps, therefore, towards Padua, he hired in that city a magnificent palace for his residence during the coming winter, and then moving on in the direction of the Lago di Garda, established himself for the summer at Salo, a lovely spot at the head of a little bay on the western shore of the lake, at no very great distance from Brescia.

Ludovico Orsini, in the mean time, had gone on to Venice; and shortly succeeded in obtaining from the senate the command of the Venetian troops in Corfu.

Orsini and his wife remained during the rest of the summer at Salo; where, says the historian, "he hired a superb villa, and strove by various pastimes to divert his wife, and his own profound melancholy caused by his infirmities of body, which became more and more troublesome, and by the memories of Rome, and of his own excesses." The picture of the "interior" of Vittoria and her princely husband in their delicious villa in one of the loveliest spots in Europe, is not



hard to imagine. Only we should be inclined to suggest, that in all probability the parts sustained in that domestic drama, as far as the efforts to amuse were concerned, were rather the reverse of the cast supposed by the historian. We cannot but suspect that these "efforts" fell to the share of the young wife, while the all too unamusable patient was the princely husband. Perhaps, also, we might venture to infer that these sweet summer months on the beautiful shores of the lake beloved by poets, were not a period of unmixed connubial felicity to the lady Vittoria. The reward of ambition had not come yet. But perhaps it was coming, and that in no very distant future. That one's newly-married husband should weigh twenty stone, and have a "lupa" consuming his bloated limbs, may in one point of view be unfavourable circumstances. But from a different stand-point they may be very much the reverse. After all, a well-jointured widowhood, to be made the most of while yet in the flower of her age and the pride of her beauty, with the rank of a princess, and the revenue of one, might be a better thing than to be the wife of either a pope's nephew or a great prince. We can understand that the position of a wife may well have begun to show itself to the beautiful and accomplished Vittoria as not the most desirable in the world.

Still Vittoria could not disguise from herself that she had rather difficult cards to play. The whole of the great Orsini clan were her enemies, for the same reason that moved the enmity of Ludovico. From the pope she had little reason to expect either favour or protection. The Duke of Florence, and the powerful Cardinal de' Medici, his brother, were hostile to her on the grounds which have been explained. Her own eldest brother, the only one of them who had such a position as could have enabled him to afford her any support or protection, had also been estranged from her by the marriage she had contracted in despite of his prohibition. It was a dreary outlook into the future for a young beauty only a few years out of her girlhood. And as her husband's

increasing malady brought the consideration of it more closely before her, she felt that she should need all that the most cautious prudence and self-possession could effect.

Orsini, to do him justice, seems to have been anxious, when the conviction of the great precariousness of his life forced itself on him, to make the best provision he could for her who had been either the partner or the victim of his crime. About the beginning of November in that autumn of 1585, he made spontaneously, as the historians especially assure us, a will bequeathing to Vittoria a hundred thousand crowns in money, besides a very considerable property in plate, jewels, furniture, carriages, horses, &c. It was further ordered that a palace should be purchased for her in any city of Italy she might select, of the value of ten thousand crowns, and a villa of the value of six thousand. Moreover, a household of forty servants was to be maintained for her. And the Duke of Ferrara was named the executor of this will.

Having made this provision, the prince determined on a journey to Venice in search of better medical aid. But a journey in this direction did not by any means suit the plans which Vittoria had determined on. Reflecting on the dangerous amount of hostility which would surround her on every side as soon as her husband should have breathed his last, and conscious that this would be increased by the exorbitancy of the provisions of the will in her favour, she had made up her mind that her only safe course was to get her husband out of Italy while it was yet possible, over the Swiss frontier, which is at no great distance from Salo, so that at the moment of his death she and her property might be in safety under the protection of the Cantons. But the journey to Venice threatened to destroy this scheme, for it became daily more evident that the end was not far off.

Vittoria, therefore, strove to persuade him, before they had got far on their way, to return to Salo. And as the sufferings of the invalid in travelling were greater than he had anticipated, she had not much difficulty in doing so; though the

difficulty of moving, which drove him back, seemed to promise ill for the scheme of getting him to travel very far in the opposite direction.

On the 12th of November, however, Orsini felt a little better. On the 13th his physicians bled him, and left him with somewhat of better hope that, by strict attention to a severe system of diet, and extreme temperance, some degree of restoration might be looked for. To Vittoria this reprieve was all-important, as promising a possibility of putting her plan for escaping into a secure asylum into execution. The noble patient only knew that he felt better than he had for many days; and, little in the habit of suffering a denial to the demands of any of his appetites, and delighted to find that any of them were still sufficiently alive to afford him the means of a gratification, he ordered, as soon as the doctors were out of the house, that dinner should be served him. Nobody dared to disobey or to remonstrate; so fine a thing is it to be too great a man to be contradicted. The dinner was brought, and once again the gross body had the pleasure of swallowing. The prince, says the historian, ate and drank as usual. But, scarcely had he finished his repast, before he fell into a state of insensibility; in which condition he remained till two hours before sunset, when he expired.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### WIDOWHOOD IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY: ITS PROS AND CONS.

THIS sudden catastrophe was a terrible blow to Vittoria, who seems to have been perfectly well aware of all the dangers and difficulties of her position. "As soon as she saw that the prince was dead," writes the monk Tempesti, "the ill-advised Vittoria fell into a swoon; and when she recovered from it, gave way to utter despair, oppressed by the tumult of thoughts which all at once rushed to her mind. She thought of the

loss of her present grandeur, of the necessity of returning to an obscure life without protectors and without support, exposed to the rage of the Orsini, detested by Ludovico, by the Cardinal de' Medici, and by all that royal family. She saw vividly before her her first murdered husband, who upbraided her with the great love he had borne her. And this painful thought was rendered more insupportable by the consideration of the incomparable greatness of the Peretti family, now that Sixtus was pope. Overpowered by these bitter reflections, which thus shaped themselves to her mind, 'If only I had had better judgment, I should now be a princess in the enjoyment of every happiness in Rome! I should be waited on, courted, worshipped by all Rome, instead of being an exile, a wanderer, with treachery around me on all sides, and odious to Sixtus, whom I have so deeply outraged!' She felt so keen a pang of shame and despair, that she seized a pistol to put an end to her troubles. But her brother Flaminio (who had joined her immediately after her husband's death) struck it from her hand."

Her brother Marcello had also joined her at Salo, and the first step they took was to write to announce the death to her enemy Ludovico, who was still, it seems, at Venice, not having yet departed to enter on his new duties at Corfu.

Prince Paolo Giordano Orsini had left by his first wife, Isabella de' Medici, a son, Virginio Orsini, who was at the time of his father's death being educated at Florence, under the care of the duke, his maternal uncle. This young man was, of course, the natural heir of the deceased prince; and the will made in favour of his widow, though it in no wise touched the immense territorial possessions, nor would, according to our mode of feeling on such matters, appear an unreasonably large provision for the widow of a man of such fortune and position, was denounced by the family as monstrously unjust towards the heir. Their first step was to attempt to set the document aside, legally, on the ground of its having been made *at the instigation of too violent an affection.*

Vittoria, when the first violence of her despair had in some degree subsided, on looking round her to see where she might hope for aid, decided on making three applications. Her first letter was to the Duke of Ferrara, who had been named the executor of her husband's will. And the Duke, it would seem, promised that he would, and did, take care, that any questions arising on it should be honestly and fairly determined by the proper tribunals, and that it should receive full execution. The second letter was to the Senate of Venice, in which she set forth her friendless position, mentioned modestly her claims on the protection of the republic as the widow of an Orsini, and besought the senators to see that she had justice done her. This application also was favourably received; and the Senate ordered their governor in Padua to see that she was put in possession of at least that valuable movable property in jewels, &c., which was then in that city. The third application was a more difficult one to make; and in it she took a totally different tone. In her letters to the Duke of Ferrara and to the Venetian Senate she evidently had not abandoned the hope of securing the splendid position which her husband had intended to provide for her. But in the third, which was to no other than Pope Sixtus, she represented herself to stand in a very different position. She appears to take it as certain, in writing to him, that she shall fail in making good her claim to any provision whatever under her husband's will; does not even intimate any intention of resisting the intentions of his family; talks much of her remorse and repentance, disgust with the world and all its vanities; and begs of his charity an alms of five hundred crowns to enable her to enter some convent, either in Rome or Venice. It may be shrewdly doubted whether Vittoria intended this humble plea for the injured pope's merciful consideration to be taken by him quite literally. Sixtus, however, either did not or would not see any other meaning in it. His sister Cammilla, whose agony for the loss of her son we have seen, and who found it too hard a task to pardon the false

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wife, who had, as she doubted not, conspired to murder him, would fain have had the pope reject her supplication. But, "What!" said Sixtus, "if this wretched creature repents, and wishes to spend the remainder of her life in God's service, shall we, His vicar, refuse to her the means of doing so?" So he gave orders that the exact sum asked, neither more nor less, should be remitted to her at Padua.

Vittoria wrote also to her brother, the Bishop of Fossombrone, acquainting him with the misfortune that had befallen her. It is likely that she had placed no great reliance on help or comfort from this quarter. But she, in all probability, hardly expected to receive a reply, in which the right reverend prelate, whose morals had by this time, it is to be supposed, reached a pitch of the most aggravating sanctity, told her that since her present position was miserable, and there was every reason to suppose that worse was at hand, she ought to thank God for having thus shown her the vanity of all earthly hopes and pleasures, and put the passing hours to profit in preparing herself for eternity, as it was very evident that the Orsini would not be content without compassing her death.

The *dramatis personæ* of this faithful extract from the chronicles of the good old times, are every one of them, it must be admitted, far from engaging characters. But the present writer may mention, as a little bit of confidence between him and the reader, that he, for his part, would experience less repugnance in taking any one of them by the hand—even the noble twenty-stone Orsini himself—than this young man of saintly morals developed into a bishop.

In the meantime, Ludovico Orsini had arrived in Padua from Venice; and his first interview with the beautiful widow showed her only too clearly what she had to expect of justice, forbearance, or knightly bearing from so illustrious a nobleman. He came with a retinue of armed men at his heels, whom he bade to surround the house, and keep good watch that nothing left it; while he went in, and, roughly calling

the frightened widow to his presence, bade her give account to him of everything the late prince had left. Having no means of resistance, Vittoria had no choice but to obey. But Ludovico, finding, we are told, that certain objects of value which he knew his cousin to have had in his possession were not forthcoming, became so violent in his threats, that, being in fear for her life, she produced the missing articles, "and gave him good words, and behaved with so much submission, that he wrote off to the Cardinal de' Medici that there would be no difficulty in the business, and that the whole matter was in his own hands." On learning, however, shortly afterwards, that, notwithstanding her timidity and apparent submissiveness, the widow had already made application to powerful protectors, and had taken steps for the enforcing of her legal rights, the noble bully was all the more enraged, from having prematurely boasted to the Medici of his power to crush her and her pretensions so easily. Vittoria, moreover, immediately, as it would seem, after this scene of violence, took the prudent step of removing to the house her husband had hired in Padua. She was there more immediately under the protection of the podesta of that city, who had been charged by the Senate to see that the will in her favour was duly carried into execution as far as the goods situated within the territory of the republic were concerned; and was altogether, in such a city as Padua, less exposed to any lawless violence than at Salo.

Meanwhile the Duke of Ferrara had also been taking steps to have Vittoria's title to the chattel property duly decided by the Venetian courts. And on the 23rd of December a decision was given on the various points raised in her favour. Whether she would ever be able to make good her claim to the remainder of the large property to which she was entitled under her husband's will seemed exceedingly doubtful. But, as was always the case at that period, when a very much larger portion of the wealth of the rich consisted in plate, gems, tapestry, and other such movable goods, than in these

days of public funds and joint-stock companies, the property secured to her by the decision of the Venetian courts was very considerable; sufficiently so, in all probability, to have already worked a change in the fair widow's views as to the desirability of ending her days in a convent, and certainly not disposing her to adopt her reverend brother's pious and fraternal mode of looking at her position and prospects.

But if the sentence of the judges at Padua was of sufficient importance to make a notable difference in the prospects of Vittoria, it had unhappily a fully proportionate effect in exasperating the rage and cupidity of her enemies. And the result which followed in the powerful and populous walled city of Padua, under the strong and vigilant government of the Republic of Venice—by far the best of any then existing in Italy—is a notable and striking sample of the social life of the sixteenth century.

That same night, the night of the 23rd of December, the house in which Vittoria was living was forcibly entered by forty armed men in disguise. The first person they met was Flaminio Accoramboni, who was immediately slain. Marcello, the other brother, had left the house but a short time previously, and thus saved his life. The assassins then proceeded to the chamber of Vittoria, and one of them, a certain Count Paganello, as it afterwards appeared, seized her by the arms, as she threw herself upon her knees, and held her, while Bartolomeo Visconti—another noble, observe—plunged a dagger into her side, and “wrenched it upwards and downwards until he found her heart.”

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE MAJESTY OF THE LAW.

HAD the deed, thus quickly done, and quickly told, been perpetrated in those days in any other part of Italy save the terri-



tory of the Queen of the Adriatic (and, it is fair to add, save Rome, also, during the short five years of the papacy of Sixtus the Fifth), this history would probably have been all told, and have ended here. But the government of Venice, with all its faults, did perform more of the duties for which all governments are established, than that of any of the Italian states of that day, and meted out justice with an impartiality and a vigour unknown elsewhere. How much vigour was needed for the task, and how hard a struggle law—even in the hands of the powerful and unbending oligarchy of Venice—had with lawless violence, is curiously shown by what follows.

The paucity of dates, universal in the old Italian chroniclers, has already been complained of. But with regard to the concluding facts of this history, we are puzzled by the multiplicity of them. They all, however, especially as given by a contemporary writer, whose account was reproduced in the pages of the "*Revue des Deux Mondes*" some twenty years ago, mention days of the month only. The murder of Vittoria is stated to have taken place on the night of the 23rd of December. And the French writer tells the story as not doubting that this was the December following the November in which Orsini died. Yet it is hardly possible to suppose that all which must have happened in the interim, the protest against the will, the consultations between Ludovico and the Medici at Florence, the action in the matter of the Duke of Ferrara, and, above all, the legal examination and decision of the Paduan law courts, all took place within forty days. Moreover, some of the dates assigned to the remaining facts of the story are evidently erroneous. Assuming, then, that the date of the murder is correctly given, as being that least likely to have been forgotten, the remaining facts may best be told, without attempting any accurate statement of the days on which they occurred. They no doubt happened, as related, immediately after the commission of the murder.

On the morning following, the bodies of the murdered brother and sister were laid in a neighbouring church, and all Padua thronged to see the pitiful sight. The exceeding beauty of Vittoria moved to frenzy the pity and indignation of a people whose capacity for emotion was fostered and cultivated by every peculiarity of the social system in which they lived, at the expense of their reflective powers and judgment. They "gnashed with their teeth," as the historian says, against those who could have the heart to destroy so lovely a form. Of course the news of *such* a murder was very rapidly spread all over Italy; and when it reached Rome, the monk biographer of Sixtus naïvely tells us, the pope, who was in the act of sending off the five hundred crowns which poor Vittoria had asked of his charity, locked them up, and then visited "the seven churches" to pray for her soul instead.

It required very little sagacity to guess who was the author of the audacious crime which had been committed. And the magistrates of Padua sent at once to Ludovico Orsini to summon him to an examination. He presented himself at the tribunal with forty armed men at his back. The "Captain of the City"—the head of the executive power—shut the gates of the town-hall against this band, and signified to the prince that he could bring in with him only three or four followers. He pretended to assent, but immediately on the door being opened, the whole of the band rushed in. Before the magistrates he began to bluster, affecting to consider himself exceedingly ill-treated in being thus summoned before a court of justice. Men of his rank, he said, were not wont to be questioned. As for the death of the late prince's wife, and that of her brother, he knew nothing of the matter; but he should hold the magistrates responsible for the safeguard of the property she had held in her hands, which he demanded should be delivered over to him.

In all sincerity, the noble and lawless murderer was probably no little astonished at the measures the Venetian

magistrates were taking. His Roman experiences fully justified him in thinking that it was quite out of the question that a man of his name and station should be in earnest called upon to answer for his deeds. And he probably little thought, even yet, that the outrage his bravoës had committed would be followed by any serious results. When ordered to put his answer to the questions of the tribunal into writing, he positively refused to degrade himself by doing anything of the kind. But he offered to show the magistrates a letter, which he had written to his relative, the Prince Virginio Orsini, at Florence, in which the truth, as far as he was concerned, respecting the late occurrences, was stated, and which he demanded to be allowed to send. The magistrates consulted on the propriety of at once arresting him. But the presence of his band of armed followers, and the certainty that the arrest would not be effected without the loss of probably many lives, induced them to temporize. He was permitted to send the letter, which, of course, represented him as altogether ignorant of the means by which the Princess Vittoria had met her death, and to depart from the town-hall.

But the magistrates gave instant orders that the gates and walls of the city should be guarded, and no one permitted, without special licence, to leave the town. They also caused the messenger, who was carrying Orsini's letter to his cousin, to be stopped as soon as he was clear of the city gates; and on searching him, found a second letter, to the following effect:

“TO THE ILLUSTRIOUS LORD, THE PRINCE VIRGINIO ORSINI.

“MOST ILLUSTRIOUS SIGNOR,—We have executed that which was determined on between us; and that in such sort, that we have entirely duped the noble Captain Tondini [probably the chief of the Paduan magistrates], so that I pass here for the most upright man in the world. I did the job in person. Do not fail, therefore, to send here forthwith the people you know of.”

This letter was immediately sent off to Venice by the magistrates. And the same evening (say the contemporary accounts, though, bearing in mind the distance, about twenty miles, and the usual rate of locomotion at that day, this seems hardly credible) a special commissioner, Signor Luigi Bragadino, no less a man than one of the chiefs of the Council of Ten, arrived in Padua with full powers from the Senate, and orders to take, alive or dead, at any cost, Ludovico Orsini and all his followers.

The lion of St. Mark was a different guess sort of power to have to deal with from the imbecile and corrupt successors of St. Peter, under whose no-rule Orsini had formed his ideas of public justice. Things began to look very serious. But still he could not yet imagine that it would literally come to pass that *he* should be seized and brought to trial, like a common plebeian. He thought, probably, that a show of resistance would be sufficient to convince the magistrates that the easiest and best course was to drop the matter, as he had so often seen to be the case. So he gathered his men into his house, barricaded doors and windows, and prepared to stand a siege.

The audacity, and to modern notions, the absurdity, of an individual thus attempting to brave the whole power of the state, and that state Venice, is to us hardly intelligible. But powerful as the Senate of Venice was—far more powerful than any other Italian government of that period—and fully determined as the magistrates were to vindicate the outrage done to their authority by the perpetrators of the late crime, “at any cost,” as their orders ran, the means to which they were obliged to resort for the attainment of this end are a very significant proof of the sort of difficulties the civil power had to contend with in sixteenth-century Italy.

Luigi Bragadino, chief of the dreaded Ten, immediately on his arrival, proceeded to the town-hall, and sat there in council with the podesta and captain more than an hour. A proclamation was then issued, calling on all well-disposed

subjects of St. Mark to present themselves armed in the neighbourhood of the house occupied by the prince. Those who had no arms were directed to apply at the fortress, where arms would be distributed to them. Two thousand ducats were promised to any man who should deliver Ludovico Orsini, alive or dead, to the captain; and five hundred ducats for any one of his followers. Cannon were placed on the city walls, near which the house held by the enemy was situated. Boats full of armed men were stationed on the river, which likewise passed near the house, to prevent the possibility of escape by that means. A body of cavalry was placed in an open spot in the vicinity. Barricades were erected in the streets of the city, in case the enemy should make a united sally against the citizens. And, finally, all persons who were not armed were enjoined to keep within doors, that they might not run into danger needlessly, or embarrass the movements of the armed men.

It must be admitted that these preparations for the arrest of a murderer testify that the Venetian Government, if it declined to admit the noble Signor Ludovico's theory, that an Orsini ought to be allowed to do whatever he pleased unquestioned, was at least abundantly impressed with the difficulty of laying hands on so great a man. One of the old writers, indeed, who has recorded these warlike dispositions, seems to have felt that his readers might be struck by the apparent disproportion of the extent of them to the object in view. And to explain it, he enlarges on the consideration that the desperadoes under Orsini's orders, though but forty men, were all soldiers, thoroughly armed, accustomed to warfare, and to desperate deeds of all sorts, opposed to citizens altogether unused to arms. And he seems to imply that even the paid men-at-arms at the disposal of the city authorities were naturally to be expected to be soldiers of a very different stamp from the dare-devil ruffians in the pay of Orsini.

When these manifold preparations were all ready, three of the principal citizens of the town were sent to Orsini to ask if

he would surrender, intimating that in doing so lay his only hope of mercy.

The noble felon took a very lofty tone with these ambassadors. If all the forces assembled against him were immediately withdrawn, he said, he would consent to meet the magistrates with three or four only of his followers, "to treat respecting the matter," on the express condition that he should be at liberty to return to his house whensoever he so pleased.

The magistrates, on receiving this insolent reply, sent the bearers of it back again, with orders to assure Orsini that if he did not at once and unconditionally surrender himself, they would raze the house to the ground. He answered that he would die rather than make such a submission. So the attack was begun.

The magistrates might, one of the narrators tells us, have levelled the house with the ground by one discharge of all the artillery they had. And they were blamed by public opinion for not doing so, inasmuch as the course adopted by them involved a greater risk of the possibility that the besieged might make a sortie. And then, said the town-folk, who knew what the result might have been? But the worthy chief of the Ten, who, in the midst of his vigorous measures, "had yet a prudent mind," and did not forget that St. Mark would have a bill to pay for the mischief done, when it was all over, was bent on unkennelling the vermin with as little damage to property as might be.

One or two guns accordingly were directed against a colonnade in front of the house, which speedily came down. This did not seem, however, to abate a jot the courage of the besieged, who kept up a brisk fire from the windows, without, however, doing other damage than wounding one townsman in the shoulder. Some cannon of heavier calibre were then directed against one corner of the main building, and at the first discharge brought down a large mass of wall, and with it one Pandolfo Lesprati, of Camerino, "a man of

great courage, and a bandit of much importance. He was outlawed in the States of the Church, and the illustrious Signor Vitelli had put a price of four hundred crowns on his head for the murder of Vincent Vitelli, who had been killed in his carriage by stabs given by Ludovico Orsini by the arm of Pandolfo. Stunned by his fall, he could not move, and a certain man, a servant of the Lista family, advanced and very bravely cut off his head, and carried it to the magistrates at the fortress."

Another shot brought down another fragment of the house, and with it another of the chiefs of Ludovico's band, crushed to death in the ruins. Orsini now became aware that further resistance was hopeless. It was evident that the magistrates were in earnest in their determination to have him in their power; and bidding his people not to surrender till they had orders from him, he came out and gave himself up. He, probably, still thought that the Senate would not think of proceeding to extremity with "a man of his sort," as he frequently said. And when brought before the magistrates he behaved in this supercilious manner, "leaning against the balcony, and cutting his nails with a little pair of scissors," while they questioned him. When told that he would be imprisoned, he desired only that it might be in some place "fit for a man of his quality"; and on that condition he consented to send orders to his followers to surrender.

The town soldiers, therefore, entered the house, and marched off to prison, two and two, all the survivors they found in it; and "the bodies of the slain were left to the dogs!" Ludovico Orsini was strangled in his prison the same night. Two of his men were hung the next day; thirteen the day after; "and the gallows," says the contemporary chronicler, "is still standing for the execution of the remaining nineteen, on the first day that is not a festival. But the executioner is excessively fatigued, and the people are, as it were, agonized by the sight of so many deaths. So they have put off the remaining executions for a couple of days."

And so ends the history of the marvellously beautiful Vittoria Accoramboni and her two husbands ; a striking, but by no means unique or abnormal sample of a state of society produced and fashioned, according to the certain and invariable operation of God's moral laws, by the same evil influences, lay and spiritual—absolutely the same in kind, if somewhat mitigated in intensity—from which Italy is now straining every nerve to escape.



# THE DUCHESS VERONICA.



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## CHAPTER I.

### FAMINE, PESTILENCE, AND MARRIAGE.

By the united efforts of the Emperor Charles the Fifth and the Medicean Pope, Clement the Seventh, liberty was finally destroyed, and the despotism of the Medici established in Florence in the year 1531. In the year 1631, Ferdinand the Second, the fifth grand-duke, was reigning in Tuscany ; and a hundred years of despotism had done their work on the country according to the immutable laws in such cases appointed and ordained.

At the former epoch there was assuredly much passing among those lovely vine-and-olive-clad hills, and beneath those pure azure skies, which might have made angels weep, if we are to suppose them to look down on the fair earth man has inhabited, and the use he makes of it. There was blood on all the land, in the streets of every fair city, and almost on every smiling hill-side. Liberty died hard and slowly, amid convulsive throes, social confusion, and multiform violence. There was deadly feud between family and family, and in many cases between fathers and sons. There were crimes, treasons, falsehoods, follies, shortcomings innumerable. But there were also some heroisms ; and, until hope was finally crushed, there were many noble aspirations. Intellect was

awake, and was winning some of its noblest triumphs. Even material prosperity, and the creation of wealth, which had risen to so marvellous a height under the old municipal freedom, though sadly injured and hindered by the prevailing disorder and violence, was not smitten with paralysis. For industry and energy were yet alive ; and—as a rich soil cultivated with difficulty amid rocks and tree-stumps will give golden harvests—contrived, despite all impediments, to realize magnificent results.

In the year 1631 every feature of this picture had become changed. The country presented every symptom of moral and material decrepitude. From having occupied the highest rank in Europe in literature, science, and art, Tuscany, and Italy generally, were rapidly sinking to all but the lowest. Vast wealth indeed remained, the produce, either of former activity and enterprise, or of a legislation craftily contrived by means of monopolies and such like suicidal devices, to gather into a few hands at the expense of general pauperization. The grand-dukes themselves, especially, had by such means amassed enormous treasures. But wealth thus collected into unproductive masses engenders a social malaria as pestilential as that caused physically by huge bodies of stagnant water, instead of the beneficent and fertilizing effect which resembles that of the same element duly distributed and put into motion. Agriculture was neglected ; commerce well-nigh annihilated ; population was decreasing. But “order” had been established. All was very orderly in Church and State. There were no rebellions and no heresies. No man dreamed of disputing the absolute authority of the Government over his body, or of the Church over his soul. Not, indeed, that this “order” insured safety to life and property in the one department, or any tolerably satisfactory state of religious and moral feeling in the other. For the stiletto of the assassin was rife in the streets and palaces of Florence ; and rarely—saving always of course at Rome—has the world seen such utter demoralization and general dissoluteness combined with pro-

fuse religious professions and practices, as prevailed under Medicean rule.

Then there came upon all that festering mass of wickedness, laziness, folly, luxury, misery, prodigality, beggary, ignorance, and general incapacity of all sorts—"visitations of God"—came as surely as comets return in their course; and they *were* visitations of God as certainly as are marsh-fevers from the fens on the sluggards who will not drain them, and all the other penal and teaching evils, resulting from man's mismanagement of the moral and material elements which the all-wise Creator has destined to furnish his rewards, his punishments, and his education.

Pestilence came, and famine came. And, as we find from the historians, without surprise, all the means which were adopted for the remedy of these evils only seemed to make matters worse. The gathering of masses of the people in processions and in the churches to implore the interposition of the Virgin did not stay the pestilence; and the prohibition of all commercial intercourse or transport of commodities, failed to alleviate the scarcity. But though we may not be astonished at these phenomena, the seventeenth-century Tuscans were so. It was a terrible *disgrazia*; a tremendous indication that the "favour" of Heaven was withdrawn from the land. And every man saw in the general affliction a castigation due to the sins of his neighbours.

It does not appear to have occurred to many that their own sins had aught to do with the judgment, which all agreed that the general wickedness of the community had brought down upon it. The religious frame of mind indicated by the prevalence of such reflections does not seem to have availed in any degree to effect any improvement in the general morality. On the contrary, as has always been observed to be the case under similar circumstances, recklessness of living, excesses and irregularities of all kinds, became very manifestly more general and unbridled than ever. The testimony of history to the effect produced on masses of men by any circumstances

enhancing in an extraordinary degree the usual uncertainty of life and forcing it on their attention, is unvarying. Permanent danger to life, whether from pestilence, war, or other causes, has, very observably, ever made the reflection, "to-morrow we die," lead to the conclusion, "let us eat and drink," rather than to any line of conduct more rationally in accordance with the presumed theories of the minds thus acted on.

The morals, accordingly, of all classes were never at a lower ebb in Florence than at the period which has been spoken of. The plague had raged in the cities of Tuscany in 1630, but in the following year had almost disappeared. In 1633 it broke out again with greater virulence than ever, and brought famine—or at least a near approach to famine—with it in its train. As usual, the "visitation" had fallen most terribly on the poorer classes of the people, thus affording a very edifying proof of what might otherwise not have been imagined:—that the national sins which had occasioned it, must have been in the main the sins of the commonalty. But at the second outbreak, several personages of high position fell victims to it, and great was the consternation produced by so alarming an innovation. The panic became universal, and the prevalent dissoluteness of living coextensive.

It was near noon on a bright day of autumn in this terrible year, 1633, that old Giustino Canacci and his son Bartolommeo came out of a house in the Via dei Pilastri, near the church of Sant' Ambrogio, still noted as the scene of some of the events about to be narrated in the following pages. The old man was in his seventieth year; the young one about twenty-five.

"There they go!" said the senior, after glancing up and down the street; "another house shut up, and the mark on the door since last night. Ah! it's neighbour Faldi this time! Well! well! we are here to-day, and gone to-morrow."

"Not you!" said his son, savagely. "No such luck! You don't look like going to-morrow, nor the day after neither."

"You'll look like it, reprobate that you are, long before you are my age," returned the sire. "A pretty ife you are

leading, drunk half the day and all the night, and the deaths in the quarter increasing every day ! ”

“ Yes ! a proper sort of time in Florence it is, isn’t it, for an old scarecrow like you to be thinking of marrying, of all things in the world ! With nothing but plague and famine all round one, you must needs want a wife—you ! who ought to be in your grave, plague or no plague, before now. Ugh ! It’s disgusting ! You look like a bridegroom, don’t you ? ”

“ More like one, I think, than you, my son, at all events,” said the old man, scanning with a look of unconcealed aversion the debauched, discreditable-looking figure and bloated evil countenance of the young man. “ But now,” he added, “ since the pestilence won’t take either of us, and it is a pity but what it should clear the house of one of us, do you go about your business, which is to gamble with some rake-hell or other at the Garden\* there, till you are too drunk to hold your cards, and let me go about mine.”

“ Mine is an honest business than what you are going after, any way, you old wretch ! May the murrain take you as you pass through the streets ! ” said Bartolommeo Canacci, as he turned and slouched away towards the tavern, while his father commenced his walk in the opposite direction.

It was perfectly true, that old Giustino Canacci was bent on the preposterous step of taking to himself a second wife, now, while young and old were dying around him, and it might be supposed that marrying and giving in marriage would have found but small place in men’s minds. It was true also that, in one point of view at all events, he looked more fitted to become a bridegroom than his reprobate son. He was a hale and well-preserved man, who carried his seventy years as well as so heavy a load could be borne, while his son Bartolommeo was already old at twenty-five. Beyond this, it would have been difficult to say which of the pair was the less desirable and more unpromising, regarded in the

\* A tavern so called, existing at that time in the *Via dei Pilastri*.

character of a suitor. The countenance of each was villainously bad, each in its own way. There was the same low brow and absence of forehead in both. But in the old man the narrow-pinched temples, and the backward slope of the frontal bone, indicated poverty and meanness of intellect, while the equally low but somewhat protruding and broader forehead of his son imparted a character of ferocity and brutality to the physiognomy. The small and twinkling grey eyes of the senior, set in the centre of a converging spider's net of wrinklins, spoke plainly of low cunning, watchfulness, and suspicion. The dull blood-shot orbs of the junior, under their penthouse of black shaggy brow, gave warning that the haggard lack-lustre deadness, which resulted from habitual excess, might at small provocation be changed to active malignity and cruelty. The style of dress of both father and son was as little prepossessing as might be. The old man looked mouldy, threadbare, and faded. The young one tawdry, slovenly, and wine-stained. Shabbiness and dirt were common to both.

Nevertheless, true it was that old Giustino Canacci was going a wooing; going, moreover, in no diffident mood; but with a very tolerable assurance that his suit would be a successful one. For it was, in a word, the old story. The old man had seen an article which he fancied suited him—miserable old fool—and had determined on buying it. Not that Signor Canacci was a wealthy man, far from it; but he was “pauper in ære suo;” he had wherewithal to live, and to keep a wife, too, in decent comfort and quite respectable idleness. The house from which he had just issued with that amiable son of his was his own, and was a something more than decent and respectable home. And then the times! Amid the universal distress, and misery, and precariousness, money was money, even ever so little of it; and a home was a home, even though shared with such a partner as Signor Canacci. The matrimonial market, like every other market, was dreadfully depressed. Who thought of marrying in



those days of terror ? Why, there were girls in every street, very eligible ones too, orphans without the assurance of bread to eat or roof-tree to cover them for four-and-twenty hours to come ; and more dreading to become so with every returning morning, and looking into the black hopeless future with despairing eyes. How many fathers of well-conditioned families, reduced to ruin by the hardness of the times and the stagnation of all business, looking, too, to the probability from day to day of leaving an unprotected daughter adrift upon the distracted world of that miserable, reckless, and disorganized society, would jump at the chance of securing for them the snug and safe, though modest competence, assured to the mistress of Casa Canacci ! “ Yes, yes ! ” thought old Giustino to himself, “ if the times are good for nothing else, they are good for finding a wife. Not much danger of a refusal of a good home nowadays ! ”

Pleasing himself with these reflections, the old man went on his errand, walking firmly and uprightly through the streets, now beginning to have some stir and movement in them as the hour of noon drew near.

Taking his way towards the Arno, he passed across the large open square in front of the church of Santa Croce. There, in one of the houses forming the side of the square opposite to the west front of the church, was situated one of those places for the gratuitous distribution of food, which had recently been established in various parts of the city by the young grand-duke, then in his twenty-third year, as a measure of relief to his starving subjects. The attempt was well intended ; but, carried into effect with the rude simplicity and ignorance characteristic of the time and people, it was not only as inefficient for good as those other provisions against pestilence and famine which have been alluded to, but like them, was productive of very serious increase of the calamities it was meant to alleviate. A modicum of the coarsest and cheapest food was given to any applicant. Those who are not really pressed by want, thought the prince and

his counsellors, will not seek so uninviting a meal. A modern relieving-officer would have known better. All those who previously had, by dint of striving, succeeded in obtaining wherewithal to keep body and soul together, found it more agreeable to do this at the duke's cost than by their own exertions. And, of course, increased pauperization rapidly followed the establishment of the grand-ducal relieving kitchens. It followed, moreover, from the simplicity of the plan of giving the food to the first comer, that those who were least entitled to relief were by far the most sure of obtaining it. The stout pair of shoulders, that might have earned a bit of bread for their owner, thrust aside the emaciated wretch already half-starved, the aged crone, or fragile girl, who had nought but an alms between them and absolute starvation. And a scene of fighting, screaming, pushing, despairing, cursing, was daily reproduced in front of the distribution places, which added a characteristic feature to the other painful and disorderly sights and sounds that made the streets of Florence horrible.

The hour of noon struck as Signor Giustino was passing by that end of the large piazza. It was the time at which the distribution began. And immediately as the hour was struck from the neighbouring tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, the crowd, which had for an hour or more been collected in front of the door, began to sway and undulate as if shaken by a tempest wind. Every voice was raised. The men cursed and pushed, the women screamed and scratched. There was small hope for the most helpless and hopeless among them. Yet the first served at the hatch-door that day was a woman evidently half starved and old. With desperate tenacity the miserable creature had clung on by a huge iron ring on the door, and had so, despite buffetings and imprecations, succeeded in keeping the place she had secured by being the earliest comer hours ago in the morning. Having received her dole, which she forthwith enveloped in a portion of the rags which hung about her to secure it from the greedy

hands around, she was speedily and roughly hustled out from the throng, and thus reached the outskirts of it, half-dead with long fasting, long standing, and struggling. Then appeared the ruling passion which had given the poor creature the force to withstand the buffetings of the crowd and the fatigue of the long struggle. Outside the crowd, on a door-step close to the spot where old Giustino stood amusedly looking on at the throng fighting for life, on the "*sauve mari magno*" principle, sat a wan emaciated figure, a girl of some seventeen years, who had been pretty once. To her the victorious mother brought the mess of beans, the produce of her hard fight and long endurance. It was only in a mother that spirit could thus conquer matter in that dire strife, for the starving girl eagerly devoured the entire pittance, while the old woman looked on with eyes in which the wolfish expression of her own extreme animal need was strangely blended with satisfaction at the relief of pangs sharper to her than her own.

Signor Canacci laughed a sardonic laugh as he looked on at the pair.

"Ah!" said he to himself, "now that is just what I should like Caterina to see with her own eyes. Yes, that is what girls no worse off than she may easily come to nowadays. Better, I think, to be La Signora Canacci, with a good house over one's head, and a decent meal on the table every day. Yes, yes, Caterina will know on which side her bread is buttered; she will say 'Yes!' fast enough, and 'Thank you, sir!' into the bargain."

Muttering thus to himself the old man continued his way to the Lung'arno, as the street is called which runs along the river bank, forming a magnificent terrace from one end of the city to the other. It is more magnificent now than it was at the date of this narrative. For after having remained much as it was in the seventeenth century till within these two years, it has recently been embellished and widened by new river-walls and parapets and other ameliorations after the

fashion of the nineteenth century. But such improvements can rarely be attained in the mediæval cities of Italy, save at the cost of destroying some interesting memorial of the past. And here on the Lung'arno, just where Signor Canacci emerged on it from the narrow streets behind it, the very smart cut-stone front of a specially hideous new Bank and Chamber of Commerce now occupies the spot on which stood, a few months ago, one of the most singular and picturesque structures in Florence. It was a huge dyeing establishment, which had remained unchanged, amid so many changes around it, since the days when the dyed woollens of Florence were celebrated in every part of Europe, and formed one of the principal sources of the vast wealth of the old republic. That industry, like every other, had languished and declined under the grand-dukes ; but it was still carried on in this spot, as indeed it was till the dyers were, much against their will, turned out the other day by the genius of modern improvement.

It cannot be said that the old dyeing-house was beautiful, that it bore the slightest resemblance to any order of architecture ever heard of, or that to the eye of any city surveyor, architect, or sanitary reformer, it was even decent. But it was very strange, very unlike anything else in the nineteenth-century world, and withal singularly picturesque. From vaults below the level of the street, four or five huge cavernous mouths opened on the public way, from which dense bodies of vapour were always issuing forth, while bare-armed and strangely-tinted figures might be dimly descried around steaming vats in the chiaroscuro of the den within. Piles and acres of newly-dyed goods were heaped around these doorways, or hung out to dry on the opposite parapet-wall, in innocent ignorance of the most rudimentary ideas of street police or the rights of his majesty the Public ; but to the great delight of any disciple of Prout in want of a bit of colour. The walls of the building over these vaults reached only to the height of one story. But above that, raised on

timbers at the height of about two stories more, and thus covering a vast space of open terrace, was such a roof as never entered into the mind of a modern builder to conceive. There must have been timber enough in it to have furnished forth a dozen "Prospect-rows" or Bellevue-buildings." The huge beams—each a tree from the pine forests of the Apennines—crossed each other in every possible direction and at every imaginable angle. And high in the air was the enormous beetle-browed roof, with its mellow-coloured red tiling, projecting far on all sides beyond the basement of the structure. Then must be imagined all the wondrous play of light and shadow as the rays of an Italian sun darted in and lost themselves among that quaint forest of timbers; and further, the effect of the long pendent draperies of newly and brightly-dyed stuffs hung up here and there among the recesses of the labyrinth of beams; and then it will be understood that the old roof of the dyers was a bit of Florence dear to an artist's heart.

And there it stood unchanged for more than two centuries after Signor Giustino Canacci's visit. Now it is gone, and a prim, more or less Palladian Bank stands in its place.

As Signor Canacci passed along the front of the building, he saw the man he was in search of sitting listlessly on a little bench at the entrance to one of the vaults which have been described. Each of these was tenanted by a different member of the trade, although the terrace above and the roof were in common to all of them. Time had been when Pasquale\* Bassi was a flosurishing and well-to-do citizen; but "the times" had well-nigh ruined him, as they had many others. His wife and a son had died recently of the plague. One daughter, Caterina, remained to him. If the pestilence spared him, it seemed that the task of maintaining her and himself in decent respectability would become every day a

\* The maiden family name of Caterina is not mentioned by the chroniclers. That in the text, therefore, is fictitious. The other names are historical.

more difficult one. And if it struck him down she would be left wholly unprotected and unprovided on the world—and on such a world !

Under these circumstances, it was not strange that the poor dyer, instead of hurrying home to his dinner at noon, sat sadly thinking at the door of his nearly empty and idle workshop.

“Good day, friend Pasquale,” said Giustino, as he came up to him ; “how goes the world with you this morning ?”

“Ah ! Messer Giustino ! Your servant ! Will you walk into my poor place ?”

“No, my friend ; let us have a little talk here. Fresh air, and the sky for ceiling, is better than many a chamber in these days.”

“That’s true, signore, God knows !” returned the dyer, making room for his visitor on the little bench.

“And how goes business ? Nothing to brag of, eh ?” said the old man, sitting down.

“Nothing can be worse, Messer Giustino ; and yet I suppose it *will* be worse, for we are not starved to death yet !”

“Nay ! there is surely less danger of that than usual. There is such a good chance of escaping it by dying of the plague. But it is, I admit, a comfortable thing in these times to depend on no man and no business for one’s bed and board.”

“Ay ! for my part I wish I was out of it all, one way or other. If it were not for Caterina, I would not cross the street to avoid the murrain.”

“My dear friend, don’t let the Signora Caterina stand in your way in the matter. Here I am to renew my proposal and receive your answer. I offer Caterina a sure and comfortable home, and a respectable position at my death. Have you made your reflections ? Is it to be a match ?”

“Of course, illustrissimo Signore Giustino, the proposal of such an alliance is too great an honour for our poor house ; and most true it is that in such a time it would be an unspeak-

able comfort to settle my poor motherless girl so unexceptionably. But pardon me if I allude to one circumstance that causes me some misgiving. Il Signore Bartolommeo, your excellent son ! Do you think that his residence with so young a mother-in-law would—that is, might, perhaps——”

“Caro mio ! what are you dreaming of ? Assuredly I should never ask Caterina to live in the house with Bartolommeo. But hark, in your ear. I am tired of living in the house with him myself. Out he goes, and that to-morrow. And after all it will not be much difference to him, for he well-nigh lives at the pot-house as it is. No, no ! Put Bartolommeo quite out of the question.”

“Honestly, most respected sir, under other circumstances, I might have wished—certainly not a more honourable establishment for my poor Caterina ; indeed, we never could have aspired to such an alliance—but, to speak frankly, a husband more of her own time of life. She is not yet sixteen, *la poveretta* !” added the father, with a heavy sigh ; “but paying due attention to the just reflections your worship has put before me, I do think that I cannot do better for my poor girl than accept your honourable and flattering proposals.”

“Basta ! that’s settled, then. And now, my poor Pasquale, is it not a comfort to think that you may die in peace of the plague to-morrow, and leave Caterina well provided for ? ”

“Signore, it *is* a comfort. She is all I have left ; and she was always, as your worship knows, the sunbeam in our poor house ; as good a girl, Signore Giustino, as ever father and mother had—docile, obedient, gentle, loving ; modest, always contented to be at home, never gadding after admiration ; and you know, Signor Giustino, whether she has had temptation in that line ! A good girl, Signor Canacci, a good girl ; and I trust she may make a dutiful wife.”

“I doubt it not, my friend ! A home-keeping daughter will make a home-keeping wife ; and that is what I want.

Now, I will go straight to Messrs. Jacopo Buonaccorsi, and tell him to prepare the contract. We won't lose time, for who knows how much we may have of it? When shall I come and have a talk with Caterina?"

"To-night, after the Ave Maria, if you will, Ser Giustino."

"Hum! after the Ave Maria? I like to be at home, with my doors well shut and bolted, after the Ave Maria, friend Pasquale. It's not good walking in the streets after sun-down nowadays in Florence. Suppose we say to-morrow, at this hour?"

"At your pleasure, Signor Giustino. Caterina shall expect you at mid-day to-morrow."

"God have you then in his keeping, my good Pasquale, till this time to-morrow."

"Signor Giustino, I kiss your hands. At this hour to-morrow."

And so the ruined dyer and his proposed son-in-law parted.

As soon as the latter was out of sight, Pasquale Bassi rose slowly from his seat, and walked with downcast eyes and thoughtful brow towards the desolate home in a neighbouring street, where Caterina was expecting his mid-day return from the workshop, to announce to her the destiny that awaited her.

But it must not be imagined from the poor dyer's evident heavy-heartedness, that his care was caused by any such feelings as might be supposed to darken the heart of an English nineteenth-century father, about to make a similar communication to his daughter. It was rather the general aspect of the times and his own imminent ruin that caused the Florentine father's melancholy. Few such, probably, in his position would have admitted, even to the extent Pasquale Bassi had in his conversation with Canacci, that a younger bridegroom would have been more desirable than a match with a patrician living in his own house and independently on his own means. The prevailing feelings and ideas with regard to marriage were such, and similar unions were so far from



rare, that none of the repugnance was likely to be felt, either by the girl thus sold or by her family, which a similar proposal would excite in a sounder and healthier state of society.

So, when Pasquale Bassi reached the still decent but sadly desolate home, from which two of its inmates had recently been snatched by the pestilence, and much of its material plenishing carried off by the distress arising from it, and found poor Caterina sitting in solitude at the window waiting for him, the news he brought her produced none of the emotion which differently situated and differently bred damsels might have felt. She was sitting disconsolately enough, with her distaff at her shoulder and the spindle between her fingers; but they had forgotten to twirl it. Her head had fallen on her bosom, and her mind was busy with the utter hopelessness of the prospect before and around her.

"Caterina, my child," said the father, "I have had Messer Giustino with me. He came for my answer; and he is to be here at mid-day to morrow. He has now gone to his lawyer to order the contract to be prepared. My child! my child!" added he, after a long pause, "God grant that it may be well with thee!"

"But, father! that horrible man—that son of his—that Bartolommeo!"

"I spoke of that, my Caterina; and Ser Giustino said that he would no longer live in the house—that he himself could not live with him."

"Ah! that is a great point gained, my dearest father! That was my greatest dread. With Ser Giustino I shall do very well, doubt it not. He means well; and I will do my duty by him. But I am loth to leave you, my father—all alone here," she added, with a glance round the desolate room, "and in such times too!"

"I have got it in my head, Caterina mia, that it is I who will leave you before long. And you may guess whether my mind is easier at the thought of leaving you, at least in a safe and honourable home."

“My own darling father ! do not talk in that manner. All will yet be well. These dreadful days will pass away, the business will revive, and we shall talk over the bad time of the pestilence often of a winter evening in Casa Canacci.”

“So be it, my child !” returned the broken-spirited father, striving to shake off his depression and black presentiments. “So be it, my own Caterina ! And now, darling, I must go to our good friend Beppo Fierli, to tell him to see Messer Giustino’s lawyer on our part.”

And Caterina was again left in complete solitude to meditate on the new life before her.

Thus was definitely settled the marriage of the loveliest girl in Florence—for such all the old chroniclers, who have recorded these facts, agree in declaring her to have been—in her sixteenth year, with a dirty, disagreeable, mean-minded old man, aged enough to be her grandfather. And Heaven was called on to bless the union ; and the parties to the monstrous bargain hoped that good would come to them of it ; and Caterina went to her new home honestly meaning “to do her duty” by her husband.

## CHAPTER II.

### A FLORENTINE HOME IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

So Messer Giustino Canacci—or *dei* Canacci—for it would seem from some of the chronicles that he was entitled to the “particle noble,” which indicated his patrician birth and quality—Messer Giustino dei Canacci bought his lovely young wife dirt cheap, in consequence of the hardness of the times, and the depression of the market for that as for other articles. And pretty Caterina Bassi, who, as her father said, with perfect truth, had for sixteen years been as good a girl and dutiful a daughter as parents could wish to have, the stay of their age and the sunshine of their house—pretty innocent

Caterina went to her new home very thoughtfully, purposing, as she said, "to do her duty" by her septuagenarian husband.

What precisely was her idea of this duty to be done, it might probably be somewhat difficult to investigate. It, of course, was the result of the teaching, avowed and unavowed, conscious and unconscious, which she had received from the religious theories and the social practices in vogue around her. This much, however, is at all events clear, that according to Nature's view of the matter, poor Caterina might as well have undertaken to do her duty as Emperor of China. What could have been her duty in the matter, unless to every proposition of such marriage to oppose utter and unbending refusal? "No! It is in flagrant opposition to the supreme law, the clearest, most indubitable, most unchangeable law of God! Ever no! Death rather!" But how could the performance of any such duty as this be expected from a poor little sixteen-year old subject of Ferdinando de' Medici, and docile daughter of Mother Church! A loveless marriage is a sin against nature, fatal, irremedial, from which no good, but evil only and further sin, can arise—on which no blessing can be hoped—a sin excusable by no conceivable circumstances—justifiable by no plea whatsoever of antagonistic or antecedent obligations. But if, strange as it is, this eternal truth is not invariably recognized, and universally acted on even in enlightened nineteenth-century England, what could be expected from seventeenth century Catholic Florence! And the worst of it is, that the moral government of this world is like the law that governs a long arithmetical operation. One figure wrong in the top line, and your whole sum comes out hopelessly wrong in every part. Actions *will* produce their proper necessary and ordained consequences. A wrong step, moralists constantly tell us, ever increases the difficulty of stepping aright afterwards. But it is the special penalty attached to some false steps, that they render a perfectly upright walk for the future impossible. An error has come into the calculation. The sum cannot thenceforward be worked correctly.

So Caterina went to the decent and respectable old family house of the Canacci in the Via dei Pilastri, to do her unnatural and impossible duty.

Old Giustino, on his part, seems to have performed the conditions under which he effected his purchase. The brutal drunkard, Bartolommeo, ceased to be an inmate of the house, though his occasional visits continued to be a source of trouble to Caterina; but not more, or perhaps so much so, as to the old man himself. The "safe and assured bed and board" had been duly forthcoming. The mid-day meal and the evening supper followed each other with the most monotonously regular certainty; and there were no anxieties on this score for the morrow. In prospect this had appeared to the ruined artisan's daughter in her naked home, to be well-nigh all that was needed for happiness on earth. The hopes and aspirations of the storm-tossed seamen in imminent danger of wreck, limit themselves to the safety and repose of the harbour. And for a while the security of the asylum she had reached seemed to fill in the fruition of it all the space in her mind which it had occupied when looked forward to from amid the risks and perils of her previous position; the more so that she had found herself able, in one way or another, to afford some assistance to her father.

The dead solitude, too, in which she lived in Casa Canacci, and the strictly home-keeping habits, which fell in with Signor Giustino's ways and wishes, appeared in those early days of her married life to add to the grateful sense of security by shutting out all those miserable sights and sounds and dangers with which the plague-stricken city was rife.

The only source of interest, moreover, which remained to her outside the doors of her home, was very shortly taken from her. For poor Pasquale Bassi was stricken by the pestilence in the last days of its virulence, and followed, as he said he should, his wife and son to the grave.

Thus Caterina was left alone in the world with her aged husband.

And by the spring of the next year the plague had ceased. The Misericordia bell was no longer heard booming its sinister call over the city almost every hour of the day and night Valdarno and its enclosing hills were once more bright and smiling with the promise of abundant corn, wine, and oil. The extreme pressure of scarcity decreased gradually; and the Florentines made haste to forget the black days through which they had passed.

But all this brought no change to the monotonous dreamy life of the inmates of the still old house in the Via dei Pilastri. There the noontide meal and the evening meal still followed each other with imperturbable regularity, and the morning and the evening made up each uneventful day, unvaried save by the Sunday and Feast-day visits to the neighbouring church of Sant' Ambrogio. And Caterina, having left a year behind her the anxieties, the privations, and the labour of her maiden life, was now in her seventeenth year, though somewhat paled, like a flower shut from the sunlight, more beautiful than ever.

But unfailing succession of dinners and suppers, even though the prospect of such be stretched out with unbroken continuity into the future, will not—so perversely constituted is the human heart—suffice to ensure happiness or even placid contentment. Especially they fail to do so to a heart and mind of just seventeen years' experience of life. It was in vain that Caterina, marvelling at the change that was creeping over her, strove to call back her imagination to the days when such tranquil security as that of her present life appeared to her a haven of rest, beyond which she had nothing to ask of fate. In vain she taxed herself with capricious fickleness, and questioned her heart as to the causes of the change. She could not understand it. But the fact was there. An unspeakable weariness seemed to extend itself from day to day, like a spreading dry-rot, over her life. It all seemed empty. There was a feeling of a great craving void in her heart, craving unmistakably; but craving for

what? She spent dull idle hours in wearily thinking over the question, and found no answer to it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thus much of the story to be told may be authentically gathered out of the chronicles, which have preserved for us this specimen bit, cut out from the life of the seventeenth century. At this point the slide is suddenly withdrawn from the magic lantern; the light is put out; and the house in the Via dei Pilastri, with its inmates, vanish into darkness. The next slide projects on the magic circumscribed circle of light, a scene some four years later in date. There would be very little difficulty in filling up the chasm between the two periods with very satisfactory assurance of truthfulness. But as the reader can do this for himself quite as well as the writer could do it for him, and as it is intended to present here only what is warranted by the record, the raree-show shall re-open with the spring of 1638.

\* \* \* \* \*

Five years have elapsed since we left Caterina, in her seventeenth year, "doing her duty" to her husband, then in his seventieth. She is now twenty-two and he seventy-five—and the wifely duty has become somewhat simplified. For, five years beyond the threescore and ten make deep marks in their passage.

It was the third hour of the night, as the old chroniclers have it, reckoning after the Italian manner—not yet abandoned in remote parts of the country—from sundown, which was called "the twenty-four"—the third hour of the night in Casa Canacci, which at that season of the year must have been about ten o'clock. The mistress of the house was in a sitting-room on the ground-floor, at the back of it, looking into a very small garden; and was occupied, assisted by a

neat and pretty maid-servant, some five or six years older than herself, in preparing a table for supper.

The five years, which had sped Ser Giustino so rapidly onward in his down-hill path, had apparently done little or nothing towards advancing his beautiful wife on her way to the top of it. She was, if anything, more lovely than ever. Something, perhaps, may have been due to the style of her attire, which was strikingly different from what it had been in the first years of her married life. It had then been almost monastic in its unadorned simplicity. Now, without making any pretence to the splendour which was then in vogue among the noble and wealthy, it was entirely modish in fashion, and worn with that provocative grace which is the prerogative of those women only who, in the envious language of those ungifted with it, "lay themselves out for admiration." Somewhat also of increased charm may have been attributable to a very evident change of mind, and consequent change of manner. The old dull listlessness was gone. The heavy vacant eye had acquired brightness and animation. The languid weary-seeming step had become brisk and alert. All the old passivity and apathetic sense of the emptiness of life had vanished. Something had evidently come into the circle of her life which had given it an interest and zest of some sort. Yet any observer, whose attention had been sharpened by a real interest in the young wife's welfare, would hardly have been satisfied with her manner and bearing. Hers was not the air that speaks of tranquil happiness and well-assured contentment. The bright eye was too brilliant. Was there the fever of excitement in it? The alert step was too alert. Did its movements perchance indicate nervous exaltation? At all events, the ever-beautiful Caterina was greatly changed.

"There goes the hour!" she said to her attendant, as they both were busying themselves about the table. "What o'clock was it, Nina, when you gave the Padrone his broth?"

"Oh! more than an hour ago," replied the pretty Abigail;

"I gave it him nearly half an hour before the time, to make sure. He never keeps awake long after taking it."

"It was well thought of. But, Nina, run up and see if he is asleep. You can tread so that a condemned man listening for the step of the bargello to take him to the block would not hear you. Creep to the bedside, and see that he is really asleep."

"That I can do, signora! But, Holy Virgin! how you trouble yourself about nothing. As if anything could be heard from this room to the room upstairs looking to the street, and the roof over us a solid arch, too!"

"From this room, perhaps not; but I am afraid of the front door, just under his windows. I would not that he should be disturbed! Run up, Nina, there's a good girl?"

"Disturb him! Oh! not for the world!" said Nina, with half a tone of sneer in her voice, as she glanced with a look of intelligence to her mistress, from whom it obtained no response. And she tripped off on her errand as she spoke.

Caterina, who seemed unable to remain still for a moment, turned to a glass that stood above a console-table at one side of the room, as soon as the maid was gone, and employed herself in bestowing some of those little improving touches on her hair and dress, which women appear never to consider superfluous.

"All right, signora!" cried Nina, with a toss of her pretty head, as she returned to the supper room; "he is sleeping like a baby in a cradle, and there is no need to think about him any more till to-morrow morning, thank the saints!"

"That is well," said the young wife; but she gave a little sigh as she said it. Then, as she moved round the table for the hundredth time, she went on: "But what is this, Nina mia? These are the second-best napkins. I wanted to have the Holland damask to-night."

"I am sure those are good enough for their highnesses," said Nina; "and they are what you have always used, signora."

"Ah! But, Nina, I expect a different sort of guest to-



night, you know who. And don't you know that he must always have been used to much richer plenishing than any thing I can put before him? Run, quick, and get out the damask napkins."

Just as she said this, three gentle but distinct taps on the glass of a window by the side of the front door of the house were heard. Both women gave a little start, and the blood mantled high in Caterina's cheeks and forehead, and then as suddenly retreated to her heart.

"There they are!" cried Nina, hastily going with cat-like pace to the door, and taking as she went an oil-cruise in her hand, which stood on a side-board near the door of the room. Before opening she poured a drop or two on both hinges of the great door and on the lock, and was thus enabled to admit those who had knocked without the slightest noise.

They were two young men, patricians evidently, by the rapiers at their side, but not, as far as could be judged by their appearance, of those who formed the gay and youthful circle that surrounded the young grand-duke. One was Signor Jacopo Serselli, and the other Signor Vincenzio Carlini.

Both were, at the period of their visit to Caterina, young men of some twenty-five years old, or thereaway.

As they came in, followed by Nina, with the oil-cruise in her hand, Caterina was again standing before the glass on the console.

"What a treasure you have in our friend little Nina here, Signora Caterina!" said Serselli, as he stepped up to the lady, and kissed her hand. "A lout of a serving-man would have taken the key to open the door. La Nina understands matters better. She takes the oil-flask."

"And talking of that, lady fair," said Carlini, in his turn kissing the lady's hand, "how is his worship? He sleeps well o' nights, I hope?"

"Better than you will, I doubt, scapegrace as you are, if you ever come to be his age, which is hardly to be thought," said Caterina, smilingly, shaking a slender rosy forefinger at

him. "Ser Giustino has no remembrances that should keep him from sleeping."

"Oh, of course not! One understands all that. Youth is a new invention of the fiend. There were no young men, and especially no young women, in Ser Giustino's day. And when we have played out our playtime, we shall shake our frosty old heads at the youngsters, and wonder at the wickedness of the age. But sound sleeping is a most valuable quality in an old man, and especially in an old husband, as some think. And then, as Serselli says, Nina is such a treasure!—an invaluable nurse! If the unblemished conscience of the admirable Ser Giustino should fail to procure him that profound repose which is so necessary at his time of life—to all parties concerned—Nina could at need show herself mistress of higher flights than that trick of oiling a rusty hinge, or I am mistaken."

"What on earth do you mean, Signor Vincenzo?" said Caterina, really puzzled; "and how do you know anything about La Nina's capabilities?"

"Aha! carissima Signora mia!" returned Carlini; "perhaps I knew La Baffi before you did."

A transient cloud passed over the still girlish brow of the young wife, corresponding to an equally transient shade of doubt in her mind, which had not time, however, to assume the full consistency of suspicion before it was chased by the stronger interest that was occupying her thoughts.

For some time past, as may easily be gathered from the facts with which the reader has become acquainted, La Signori Canacci had entered on a manner of life which, to say the least, might have been deemed dangerous, and which necessitated the practice of deception on her husband. But as yet the extent of her departure from the good resolutions with which she had started on her path of married life had not exceeded this entertaining of cavaliers, without her husband's knowledge. Nor, although abundance of what most of the Florentine beauties, her contemporaries, might have

called "temptation," had been thrown in her path, had she hitherto been visited by any feeling calculated to lead her into more serious dereliction of her duty. But the Carnival, that season which seems carefully to have been arranged for the purpose of providing occasion for lenten penitence, was just over ; and in the course of those festivities and amusements, which still in some measure, but in the days of which we are speaking to a much greater degree, brought the different classes of Florentine society together, Caterina had more than once danced with perhaps the most "dangerous" man in Florence, the splendid and handsome Jacopo Salviati, Duke of San Giuliano.

The pleasure-seeking duke had been at once smitten with the truly surpassing beauty of Caterina, and had of course found little difficulty in obtaining the promise of a presentation to her from some one of those who were in the habit of frequenting her house.

This presentation was to take place on the evening of which we have been speaking ; and Salviati was to make his first visit to the house in the Via dei Pilastri.

"What was the hour you named to the duke, Ser Vincenzo, as that of our little supper ?" asked Caterina.

"Half-past ten, French time, I told him," replied Carlini ; "and you may depend on Salviati's gallantry to bring him to your door punctually at that hour. And now, by your leave, fair lady, I will go to the door, and wait for his excellency, that there may be no mistake about the house, and no noise about letting him in."

Signor Carlini had not to do duty as porter at the door very long. The Duca de Salviati was, as his friend had prophesied, as punctual to his appointment as ever languishing lover was. Caterina and Signor Serselli had been left together but a very few minutes when Carlini returned, ushering into the modestly appointed supper-room, with every manifestation of the most exaggerated obsequiousness, a very splendid-looking cavalier.

The age to which this history belongs was one specially marked by gorgeousness of personal adornment and equipment. In no part of Europe was extravagance in this respect carried to a greater height than in the capital of the wealthy and ostentatiously magnificent Medicean dukes. And at the court of the young and pleasure-loving Ferdinand the Second there was no man who could vie in nobility of birth, in wealth, in personal advantages, and in magnificence, with Jacopo Salviati, Duke of San Giuliano. A favourite with the young sovereign, whose senior he was by but a year or two, he was the soul of the court, the leading spirit in every revel, the model on which the rising generation strove to form themselves, and the loadstar of most of the brightest eyes in Florence.

Salviati, when duly presented to Caterina, accosted her as he would have done the noblest lady of the court. Far from falling in with that free-and-easy, half mock-ceremonious, half-bantering tone, which Serselli and Carlini permitted themselves towards her, his manner was courtly and respectful, though it made no attempt whatever to hide his very unmistakable admiration for his beautiful hostess. During supper he exerted himself to shine before her. The little party remained at table far into the night. And Caterina thought that she had never till now known the pleasure of social intercourse, or seen a man really worthy of a woman's love.

From that night Jacopo Salviati became a very frequent visitor at the quiet respectable house in the *Via dei Pilastri*. The ladies of the court complained that Salviati was not like himself of late; he was quite a changed man. And, in truth, he was so—as far as an engrossing passion can change a man.

Caterina, too, was a changed woman. The old feeling of the utter emptiness of all things returned, with the difference that it was confined to the hours when Salviati was not there. All the interest and vitality of her life were concentrated into the hours of his almost nightly visits. She loved for the first

time ; and now for the first time her marriage with Ser Giustino, and more still, the consequence of her recent life, seemed monstrous ; and she marvelled in all sincerity how such things had been possible to her.

And as the summer drew on, and the duke was less frequently obliged to show himself at court, it was rarely that he did not tap at the now well-known window at the usual hour. But these nightly visits were made with every precaution for securing secrecy that could be imagined. Ser Giustino, under Nina's careful nursing, always slept with admirable regularity ; and the lovers dared to think that they were happy in each other's love.

### CHAPTER III.

#### ANOTHER FLORENTINE HOME

THE Villa Salviati, still universally called by that name, though many years ago it passed into the hands of the wealthy Borghesi (who sold it to the present Lord Bexley, by whom it was again sold, on his ceasing to reside at Florence, to Signor Mario), is one of the most conspicuous and the best known of the thousand villas that stud the olive-covered hills of the Valdarno around the "City of Flowers." It stands on the lowest spur of the Apennines, some two or three miles from the city, to the north, between the great Bologna road and the little stream of the Mugnone. In its outward aspect, the Villa Salviati, backed against its aged cypress grove, has more of a mediæval castellated appearance than perhaps any other of the Florentine villas. And its general appearance is very little, if at all, changed from that which it wore when it was inhabited by Duke Jacopo and the Duchess Veronica.

That lady was, as the daughter of a sovereign prince, superior in rank to any other of those who composed the

court of the Grand Duke of Tuscany. She was the daughter of Prince Carlo Cybo, the reigning sovereign of the little dominion of Massa and Carrara : a mountainous and exceedingly beautiful tract of coast and Apennine, between the frontier of the Genoese republic and that of Lucca. The name of Salviati fills a nobler space in the page of history than that of Cybo, notwithstanding its pope and dozens of cardinals of the name, and its little morsel of rocky principality. But the Salviati greatnesses had been of the civic, not the dynastic kind, and had been achieved in the old days, when citizens counted for more and princelings for less, in Italy. And the Salviatis had been sinking in the latter generations into the subjects of a despot, while the Cybos had been rising into being despots themselves. Jacopo Salviati, therefore, wealthy, young, brilliant, admired, and Duca di San Giuliano into the bargain as he was, was considered to have "made a great match" when he married the Lady Veronica Cybo.

But "great matches" are advantages which generally have to be paid for at a very heavy rate. We have had a peep at the interior of one Florentine home, which assuredly did not appear to possess any of the elements of a happy home. Yet there also, had there been a "great match," for such, of course, the marriage of the ruin-stricken dyer's daughter with the comfortably-circumstanced patrician, Signor Canacci, must be considered to have been. Some excuse poor Caterina had for saying yes, when she should have at all hazards said no. For, want of bread is as irresistible as dangerous a counsellor. Yet her fate could hardly, even as to such matters as meet the eye, have been worse had she refused Signor Canacci, than it was after she accepted him.

In that other Florentine home, which we have now to enter, it might have seemed that Fortune had been lavish of everything that could, as far as she was concerned, make the life of its inmates happy. There were youth, health, wealth, a noble name, a brilliant position, troops of friends. Yet a

great match," there also, ruined all. Jacopi Salviati was assuredly infinitely less to be pitied for the fate he made for himself, than poor Caterina. How crawlingly mean an ambition must it have been, that could have induced a man so circumstanced to wed a woman he could never love, for the sake of "a great match" with a "princess of a reigning house."

The Lady Veronica Cybo was that most unfortunate and pitiable of all God's creatures—a woman neither to the eye nor to the mind lovely. She had not the gift of beauty; nor had she, in compensation for the deficiency, that spiritual beauty of heart and mind and temper, which has often availed to win affection as passionate as, and more durable than, the conquests of unaided beauty. Infinitely fortunate for her, and proportionably disastrous for the other party to any such bargain, would it have been, if she could have changed her fate and her identity with the poorest, black-eyed, cherry-cheeked, smiling-hearted lass, who struggled hard for a modicum of chestnuts, sufficient to keep body and soul together, on the mountains of which her father was sovereign.

There does not appear on the face of the record any reason for supposing that this unfortunate princess was in any way a worse woman than her peers of that day and country. In one respect she was unquestionably better than the great majority of them. She sought for no love save that of her husband. Of course the light-o'-love dames, who hated her, would have said that there was small virtue in not seeking that which was equally unattainable to her at any price, from either husband or lover.

But the Lady Veronica did very earnestly and passionately desire the love of her husband. Poor hapless woman! The bitterest cup that has ever been mixed for human lips is surely that which has to be drained by those in whom a fatal incapacity for winning love is combined with a heart ardently athirst for it. Can it be wondered at, that, under the

infliction of such torture, the moody brow becomes darker, the acrid temper more aggressive, the unlightsome spirits more gloomy? The jealousy transmuting by its own odious chemistry love to hate, and seeking to inflict some portion at least of its own torments on the cause of them, comes to distort the view, to harden the heart, to exasperate the mind. And the unlovely and unloved wife, maddened with these scorpion stings, becomes absolutely hateful—a torment and a blister to the man whose love she would give her heart's blood to conciliate.

Thus the great match, which the head of the House of Salviati had made, had the effect of fatally and finally banishing domestic peace and happiness from his heart. But the heaviest weight of the penalty, by very far, fell on the party unsinning in the matter. The duke, who had never loved the woman he had made his wife, went his own way, heart-whole at least, if not blest; sought and found such pleasures as to his taste best supplied the place of happiness; kept out of his wife's way as much as he could; deceived her for comparative peace' sake, when it was possible to do so, and received with careless recklessness the storm of her lamentations and reproaches on shoulders weather-proof against such pelting, when it was not possible.

But the Duca di San Giuliano had become a changed man, as has been said. Not that the new passion which engrossed him rendered him a less assiduous or less admired frequenter of the court. Jacopo Salviati was still the most brilliant guest, and the most magnificent host in Florence. But the ladies found that he was changed. All that ready abundance of homage which, assorted in portions ranging in amount from an exchange of glances to a profession of eternal devotion, had formed a sort of competitive prize-fund for the emulation of the fair frail dames of the courtly circle, suddenly vanished. Bright eyes languished and obtained no responsive glances; slender fingers lingered in search of an expressive pressure, and no pressure was forthcoming; soft sighs made the lace



tremulous on snowy bosoms, but the peerless duke, so susceptible a few short months ago to such appeals to his sensibility, seemed now invulnerable as adamant. The sad phenomenon was discussed amid quivering fans and rustling silks, in the sacred privacy of many a carefully-closed boudoir. And each Marchesa Giulia or Contessa Diamante had some gentle pity to bestow on some rival contessa or marchesa of the set, who was supposed to be more specially touched to the quick by this deplorable and unaccountable defection of the most gay and gallant cavalier in Tuscany.

What could have come over the noble Salviati? What was the meaning of it? Could it be a ridiculously premature and altogether abnormal fit of devotion? There were such cases on record. But the whole tenor of the duke's life and bearing seemed to scout so preposterous an idea. Salviati was as gay as—nay, if anything, gayer than—ever. His laugh was as ready and as joyous as it had ever been, his gait as light, his smile as frank and radiant. Still, there was one circumstance which, to some of the younger of the fair bevy of dames in council, seemed to afford just grounds of suspicion that the mischief might be of this nature. La Baronessa Dianora had learned from her maid, who was particularly intimate with one of the duke's own men, that his master had recently become a member of one of the religious lay confraternities, which existed in great numbers at that time. The fact of such membership was not in any case much known or spoken of. For it was one of the rules of these societies that no man should disclose to any one not belonging to the confraternity the fact of his enrolment in it. The evidence, however, in the present instance seemed good, and the less experienced of the debaters were inclined to attach much weight to the circumstance. Those who had been longer married, however, altogether pooh-poohed it. "Oh yes! The discipline companies!" said they. "We know what that means. Why do they meet always at night? That may do for his wife, the duchess, but not for us. I think

I see Jacopo offering his shoulders to the scourge in the hand of some fat citizen, sweating his sins of false weights and clipped coin off his conscience! No, no! If Salvati is a member of one of those very convenient companies, you may be sure religion has nothing to do with the matter."

Upon the whole, the idea that the duke could have fallen into religion a good thirty years before his time was dismissed as too preposterous.

Could it be witchcraft? Ay! that, indeed, was a more probable solution of the mystery. There were not wanting among their own set those who assuredly would have the wish, and were much suspected of possessing the science, necessary for the ministering of a love-philtre to so generally coveted a prize. The Duchess Veronica herself? Ah! What more likely! The duchess, though she habitually received with magnificent hospitality all the select society of Florence, and frequently appeared, as her rank required, at the court, yet was not on such intimate terms with the generality of the Florentine ladies as to be considered one of themselves. This was in part caused by the pre-eminence of her rank—for she was the daughter of a sovereign prince—and partly by a natural reserve and seriousness of character, which indisposed her for mixing on equal terms with so very light and frivolous a society. The Duchess Veronica, moreover, was not a happy woman, and she shrank from the gay crowd, who were utterly incapable of sympathizing with her sorrows, as a stricken deer slinks away from the herd. That a wife, and one of some seven or eight years' standing too, should be made seriously unhappy by a husband's infidelities appeared so ridiculous, indeed so inconceivable, that, though many a sneer was levelled at pretensions so absurd, the greater number of her female critics believed that such conduct was but a very needlessly hypocritical mask adopted for the concealment of her own irregularities. In short, the Duchess Veronica was as unpopular in the gay world of Florence as the duke was the reverse. And it was at once agreed, nem.

con., that there was a considerable degree of antecedent probability that the duke's inexplicable insensibility to attractions which once had been powerful over him, was due to unfair tampering with the black art; and a peculiarly disgusting feature was added to the atrocity by the fact, that his own wife was the person most open to suspicion of having thus endeavoured to monopolise him.

But then, again, as it was logically urged by one deeply meditating fair one, if the Lady Veronica had been practising in this manner, it followed, from the facts of the case, that she had been successful in her schemes. If so, things must now be going very differently in that noble home from what they had all had opportunities—too many, indeed, as they declared with unanimous shrugs of white shoulders, and shaking of ambrosial top-knots—of observing before now. And the duchess would probably have been observed to clear her moody brow, and cease those absurd and ludicrous manifestations of jealousy, which made her a ridicule and really a disgrace, my dears, to society. Could any one say whether any such changes had been observed? And forthwith was elicited abundant testimony to the contrary. It was declared on all hands that the Duchess Veronica was more unbearable with her black humours and gloominess than ever. The Principessa Olympia had been at the palazzo after the passeggiata only yester evening: “And when il povero Jacopo called for his hat and gloves, and merely said to the man that he should not sup at home, you should have seen the scowl on her ladyship's face!”

“Indeed, I wonder that he ever goes home at all, for my part,” said the Contessa Giacinta, who had recently been married to a man old enough to be her grandfather; “I am sure I should not, in his place.”

And then came a whole chorus of pity for so unhappy a husband, and of indignant vituperation on so unreasonable and disagreeable a wife. But the mystery of the sad change in Salviati remained as dark as ever.

Upon one occasion, towards the end of October, in the year 1638, a good deal of conversation of the above described sort had passed among a knot of noble ladies assembled at the house of one of the party. The Contessa Cecilia Neri, who had taken but little active part in it, although it was supposed that she felt an especial interest in the subject (and her fair friends had accordingly been in a great degree talking at her), but who had none the less been an attentive listener to all that had been said, returned home determined at once to put into execution a plan which had occurred to her for arriving at the real truth of the matter. This lady was still unquestionably one of the most beautiful, though no longer one of the youngest, of the party; and it was generally understood that her career had been by no means a tame or uneventful one.

Immediately on reaching the solitude of her own chamber, she wrote, and forthwith despatched, the following note:—

“My most valued friend,—I am sure that for the sake of old times—pleasanter times they were, dear friend, than any I have seen since, I trow—you will be pleased with the opportunity of doing me a little service. There is no question of either difficulty or danger. I simply wish to know something that I am sure you can tell me, or, at all events, can find out for me. If I am not wrong in flattering myself that the occasion will not be disagreeable to you, be, at an hour after the Ave Maria to-morrow evening, at the little door in the side alley to the left of the palazzo. I do not think you can have forgotten the way to it.

“Yours, as sincerely as ever, if you will,

“CECILIA.”

(Superscribed)—“To the most Illustrious Cavalier, the Signore Vincenzo Carlini.”

This missive brought our acquaintance of the Via dei Pilastri to the little side-door in the alley between the Palazzo

Neri and the next house to it, punctually at the hour named. He had forgotten neither the unobtrusive little door, nor the dark narrow stair within it communicating directly with the lady's bower, and with no other part of the house—a remarkable architectural arrangement still to be seen in existence in some of the noble homes in Florence. In fact, it was the only part of the mansion with which the Cavalier Carlini was acquainted. Though of patrician birth, he was not of those who composed the inner circle which revolved immediately around the grand-ducal centre. And from the time that the intimacy which occasioned his visits to the postern had ceased, he had never either seen the interior of the Palazzo Neri, or spoken with its mistress. Now, as he betook himself to obey her summons, his meditations were more occupied with the terms in which the contessa's note was subscribed, than with the other contents of it; and he reflected on them more with reference to that clinking of the bucket at the bottom of the well, of which he had spoken to Caterina Canacci, than in any point of view more flattering to the still beautiful Contessa Cecilia. The lady, on her side, was bent only on obtaining the information of which she was in search, and provided she got it, cared comparatively little what price she paid for it, in whatever kind of coin might be most acceptable to her old acquaintance.

Under these circumstances they were not long in understanding each other.

“Stuff and nonsense, my good friend!” replied the lady, to a declaration of Carlini, that he really could throw no light on the matter, but would endeavour to obtain the required information—for the fact was, that he was anxious to gain time to think the business over a little before betraying a secret without knowing what use it was to be made to serve—“stuff and nonsense, my good friend! You can tell me what I want to know this instant, if you will. Don't I know that you and the duke hunt in couples? Ah! you think that we women know nothing of the proceedings of our lords and

masters outside their own palace doors. Pooh! pooh! Jacopo Salviati has some love affair on his hands which utterly absorbs him; some passion which has taken hold of him in good earnest. I want to know who is the object of it. A mere caprice! a curious whim! But I will know, and I am quite sure that you can tell me."

"I think I can undertake to say," returned Carlini, "that Salviati has formed no attachment to any lady of your world. If there is anything of the sort, it must be a mere caprice for some pretty face in quite another class."

"Thank you for nothing, my most prudent Vincenzo. I could have told you as much as that. If anybody of our world was in question, I need not have asked you for information. I am very sure that it is some mere nobody; but I have reasons for choosing to know who this nobody is. Will you tell me; or must I find out from somebody else?"

"But, Signora mia, pardon me if I ask for what purpose the Contessa Cecilia dei Neri can possibly want to know the particulars of vulgar loves, that can in no wise have any interest for the world in which she lives?"

"Vulgar loves! Cospetto! When such a man as the Duca di San Giuliano——"

"Why, carissima mia Signora, dukes will have their amusements like more vulgar mortals. Is it to your ladyship that one has to confess the fact?"

"Amusements! but I tell you Salviati is utterly absorbed by this new passion. He is lost, extinguished in his own sphere. Nothing but a veritable passion could have changed the man so totally as he is changed."

"Why; your ladyship knows how Salviati is situated at home. You know what the Duchess Veronica is."

"We all know that, I think, pretty well; but what in Heaven's name has the Duchess Veronica to do in the matter?"

"Why, gentilissima Signora Cecilia, the matter stands thus: if it were, perchance, the case that any one of your

ladyship's friends had any special interest in our noble friend Jacopo"—and he glanced archly at the lady as he spoke—"and if I could succeed in learning the whereabouts of this little bourgeoisie amourette, if amourette there be, why, all is fair in love! Our amiable Tuscan dames understand and practise the law of the gentle science in all courtesy and mutual good feeling, and there would be no harm done; but with the Duchess Veronica the case is different. She is not one of us           Tuscans," he added, as his quick eye noted a slight curl on the lip of the lady; "still less is she one of you. If the knowledge of the duke's peccadilloes should come to her ears, you know real mischief might be the result; you would not make any such use as that of the information you are seeking?"

"Now, really, old friend, you ought to know me better than that," returned the Contessa; into whose mind an idea had glided, rapid as the lightning flash, at the last words of Carlini. "The real truth is, then, that one of my friends, as you say"—and she returned the arch look of intelligence with which he had previously accompanied the same words—"has a certain amount of gentle interest in the state of Salviani's heart; but you don't think I am such a marplot, such a traitor in the camp, as to carry such tales to a man's wife, at all events to such a wife as that odious Veronica! As you truly say, she is no gentle Tuscan, neither one of us, nor tolerated by us. She is a black ugly blot on the surface of our gay and laughter-loving world, a proud, gloomy, jealous, bitter-minded, detestable woman! No, trust me, you will not find me, or any one of us, in the least inclined to fight the Duchess Veronica's battles."

"In that case, I think I shall be able to gratify your ladyship; but I am sure that the amabilissima Signora Cecilia will not have been offended, that I should have been cautious not to let trouble arise out of matters that ought never to have passed out of the domain of light-hearted laugh and jest, and mutual toleration. Say I well?"

"Excellently well! most amiable of philosophers! And now, out with the secret! For I am very sure that you can tell it me on the spot, as well as a week hence."

"There is no deceiving your ladyship's practised penetration!" said Carlini, with a profound inclination. "Here it is then. Salviani's flame, for the nonce, is a certain Signora Canacci, who lives in the Via dei Pilastri. The husband is some seventy or eighty years old, I believe. There has at least been no difficulty in the way to stimulate the noble duke's ardour in the chase."

"Ah!                      that is it, is it? Methinks I have heard of that same Caterina Canacci. Of very low origin, was she not, much below the position of old Canacci, her husband; and something miraculously beautiful, I think I have heard, eh?"

"Well! a pretty face enough! a very pretty face! But what would you have! A mere doll! Neither expression, manner, nor grace! How should it be otherwise?"

"Now listen, Vincenzo mio! I have a fancy; . . . and you know, perhaps, that the shortest and easiest way to have done with my fancies—is to satisfy them. They are apt to become troublesome,                      and sometimes even dangerous otherwise. I must have a portrait of this superlatively beautiful Caterina Canacci. And you must manage to get me one, somehow or other. It cannot be very difficult to a man of your resources."

"Peerless Signora Cecilia, I am delighted to have it in my power to satisfy you on that head with the greatest readiness. It so happens that, among a few other souvenirs of the same sort, I possess a portrait of the lady in question. In some cases, Signora Cecilia, the features of one who has been loved, remain so graven on the heart, that no painter's art is needed to make the memory of them eternal. But La Caterina poveretta! When one does not bring even a scar on the heart away to remember a love-passage by, why, a touch of the artist's craft may serve as a memorial of what otherwise would be wholly forgotten."



"Aha! friend Vincenzo! So you were beforehand in Casa Canacci with our poor friend Jacopo, eh?"

"Signora Contessa! The grandees of the court have an infinity of advantages over us poor simple cavalieri. But always to be first served at the shrine of beauty is not among the number, at least in Tuscany." The falseness of this boast the reader knows.

"Bravo! Signore Cavaliere Vincenzo! When shall I have the portrait?"

"Within an hour after I quit the gracious presence of your ladyship. Shall I return with it, and myself consign it to your fair hands?"

"Nay! that would be trespassing too much on your kindness. Let it be given in a sealed envelope to my maid—you won't have forgotten Geppina—she can be trusted, as you know; and it will be all well."

"Your ladyship shall be punctually served," said Carlini, as he stooped to kiss the lady's hand. "May I hope," he added, rather hesitatingly, but looking into her eyes the while—"may I hope that sometimes, in the dull evenings between this and the beginning of Carnival, I may have the honour of an hour of your society?"

"To be sure! why not? my very good friend, Signore Vincenzo. Just at present, it is true, I am much occupied. But you shall hear from me. You may depend on hearing from me, as soon as I am able to permit myself the pleasure of a visit from you."

Carlini bowed again and took his leave, perfectly well understanding that there was to be no renewal of the terms on which he and the Contessa Cecilia had once been together; and that the treacherous signature to her note had been merely a lure to obtain from him what she wanted. They were not blessings on the head of his old friend which he invoked as he passed out of the little postern into the alley, and from that into the Via Maggio, which was the site of the Palazzo dei Neri. But it was no part of Signor Vincenzo Carlini's phi-

losophy to permit little disappointments of this nature to "pass," as he had phrased it, "from the domain of smiles and laughter," into the region of serious troubles and heart-burnings. More specially still, it was wholly contrary to his practice to quarrel with those above him on the wheel of fortune. It appeared to him the same thing as quarrelling with his bread-and-butter, or, more absurdly still, with the chances of having butter on his bread. So the Lady Cecilia had Caterina's portrait in her hands within an hour from the time Signor Carlini left her.

When the Contessa Cecilia had first conceived the idea of making use of her old acquaintance, Vincenzo Carlini, for the purpose of finding out what was really at the bottom of the change which all the court circle had observed in the Duca di San Giuliano, she had merely been actuated by a woman's curiosity to know the person of her rival. She had listened to all the nonsense chattered by the ladies around her on the subject, without taking any part in their speculations, knowing right well, *pur troppo*—as she would have said in her own Tuscan—that some new and unusually absorbing passion was the real cause of Salviati's recent insensibility to all the agaceries that could be brought to bear upon him. Several of the "ornaments of the court" of Ferdinando the Second had been more or less piqued and irritated by this rebellion against legitimate authority; but the only heart that had really been hit hard by it was that of the Contessa Cecilia. She accordingly had been more clear-sighted than the rest in divining the true state of the case.

The Duchess di San Giuliano, as has been said, was by no means popular among the light-hearted and light-mannered beauties of the Tuscan court. But, as will be readily imagined under the circumstances, she was especially the object of the Signora Cecilia's aversion. A reference to the best authorities on the nature and idiosyncrasy of the female heart, would lead to the further belief that that high-born lady did not feel kindly towards the unknown beauty whose low-born charms

had so wrought on the noble duke. Further still, the recorded effects which have been observed with remarkable uniformity to follow the "*spretæ injuria formæ*," justify us in concluding that it would not be displeasing to the neglected fair one to have visited with a certain amount of punishment the recreant knight himself.

Now, unfortunately, the word which Carlini had let fall about the mischief likely to follow from any communication of the facts of Salvati's infidelity to the duchess, had suddenly suggested to the lovely and amiable Cecilia a method by which, as it seemed to her, she might succeed in killing three birds with one stone.

• "Now for a sight of this redoubtable rival!" sneered the contessa in soliloquy; and she clutched the packet containing the miniature, and impatiently tore open the envelope. "Now we shall see what the dyer's daughter is like—a dyer's daughter, they say, whose sire and mother both died in the plague year! Why, what is the use of noble blood and gentle birth, if the dregs of the populace—born in squalor, and reared in misery—can rival us in all a woman cares to live for! Now for it!" and she opened the case of the little portrait.

"Bah!" she cried, after a long and earnest look, during which her handsome but haughty features had curled into a sneering smile. "Bah! is that all?" And taking a taper in her hand, she approached the mirror on her toilette-table, and seating herself in front of it, scanned the two faces before her. The comparison seemed satisfactory to her.

"A pretty face!" she said. "Yes, certainly a pretty face—pink cheeks, white forehead, black eyebrows, deep-blue eyes, crimson lips! A very pretty bit of colouring! Contour, meaning, grace, expression, fire, passion—nothing. Bah! That won't last long. But that it should have endured at all, merits, methinks, some little measure of punishment—a punishment which, I take it, will have the effect of bringing back her stray sheep to its proper fold! This pink and white doll

shall be taught to seek her lovers among her fellows for the future. And yon proud duchess, with her kill-joy face, and insolently-censorious ways, shall find that it would have been more for her happiness never to have come to our bright Florence, to lord it over Tuscan dames."

With these thoughts in her heart, she sat down before a writing-table, and penned in large, coarse characters, which perfectly masked her own handwriting, the following billet:—

"A true friend to the Duchessa di San Giuliano—perhaps the only one she has in this vile, dissolute court—sends her the enclosed miniature. It is the portrait of one Caterina Canacci, who lives in the palazzo of that name, in the Via dei Pilastri; an abandoned woman, who has so bewitched the noble Jacopo Salviati, that his days are passed in thinking only of her, and his nights in her company. Should any doubt of the truth of these facts remain in the mind of the duchess, she may with ease dispel them by acquiring certain evidence of the duke's frequent visits to the house indicated.

(Subscribed)

"A CITIZEN AND LOYAL SUBJECT OF  
MASSA."

When she had completed the above note, and placed it in an envelope, together with the miniature, addressed to the duchess, at her Villa Salviati, she rang her hand-bell, and said to Geppina, when she answered it:

"Let one of your own friends, Geppina, some one you can depend on, and who is not known in any way as belonging to this house, take this packet to Villa Salviati, leave it, and come away without waiting to be asked any questions. And take care he speaks no word, either before or afterwards, of his errand."

The packet was at Villa Salviati the following morning, before the duchess was up; and how it was placed in her hands as she sat at her morning toilette shall next be told.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE PORTRAIT.

ON the morning after the interview between the Contessa Cecilia and Signor Carlini, the duchess was sitting in her chamber, while two lady's-maids were assisting her in the various operations of the toilette. A seat in front of a mirror is a position conducive to good humour and a pleasant state of mind in the case of many a woman. With the Lady Veronica it was not so. She was about twenty-six years old at that period, and already time and suffering had done their defacing work on the never-comely features. The looking-glass offered no consoling picture to the unhappy duchess. She was just then particularly sore at the duke having joined one of the far-famed companies of flagellants.

It is an historical fact that Salviati made himself a member of one of these bodies, whose place of meeting was conveniently near Caterina's house, in the Via dei Pilastri. They were popularly called "buche"-holes, or dens, that is, and, especially about the time at which the events here related took place, they played a very conspicuous part in the social life of the period and its irregularities. They took their origin from the well-known mediæval madness of the flagellants; and mutual "discipline" was the real object of the meetings in their earlier day. They always met by night, and professed to pass the whole of the vigils of the Church in devotion. This specialty of their rules made membership of them so extremely convenient a portion of the social life and manners of the seventeenth century that the number of societies of this nature, which had been seventy-five in the year 1527, had increased to the extraordinary number of one hundred and forty-nine in Florence alone! They were finally suppressed at the extinction of the Medicean dynasty.

Among all the members of the hundred and forty-nine con-

fraternities, it must be supposed that some, at least, proposed to themselves, if not a literal compliance with the original "discipline" of the institution, at all events some sort of practice, such as probably the recitation of interminable litanies, which was, according to the ideas of that day, deemed to possess prophylactic virtues against the spiritual consequences of sinful lives. But very few persons in Florence could have been persuaded to believe that the gay and pleasure-loving young Duke of San Giuliano was among these. Least of all would it have been possible to induce his own wife to attach a moment's faith to anything of the sort. That the duke was really enrolled on the list of one of these brotherhoods was likely enough; that he even presented himself at the place of meeting, and was noted as so present, was very possible; that he might have pushed his regard for appearances so far even as to have been seen at the end of the pious mummeries, divesting himself of the sort of white domino and hood worn by the members, was also possible. But who could know what had become of the figure thus masked, during the many intervening hours, save the faithful Luigi? And that nothing was to be gained by interrogating *him* either personally, if she could have condescended to do so, or indirectly, by means of her serving-women, the Lady Veronica well knew.

The practice of disguising themselves which was adopted by all these confraternities, ostensibly that their good deeds might not be seen of men, was one of the circumstances which made enrolment among them invaluable to those who had matters of any sort on hand which required concealment. It would seem as if nothing had been neglected by which these professedly religious institutions could be made perfectly adapted to every purpose of social disorder and vice. The long white gown reaching to the heels, and the capacious hood, with its two holes for the eyes, descending below the shoulders, formed a disguise which set at defiance all possibility of recognition. The well-known costume was far too

common to excite either surprise or remark, let it be seen where it might; and was, of course, equally available and equally convenient for the libertine whose object was another man's wife, as for the street-thief whose aim was another man's pocket-handkerchief; for the gallant bent on scaling a nunnery wall, or the burglar intent on breaking into a dwelling-house; for the abduction of a damsel, or the murder of a rival.

The sombre humour and never-sleeping jealousy of the Duchess Veronica were, as may easily be imagined, not a little deepened and exacerbated by the new and sudden fit of devotion which had shown itself by leading her lord to enrol himself a member of the "*Buca di San Antonio*," in the Borgo Pinti. Her imagination pictured to her the perfectly disguised white figure, unobtrusively attended by the trusty Luigi, gliding out from the assembled congregation, and betaking himself—whither?—to spend the intervening hours before stealing back in the morning's dawn to leave his gown and hood at the "*buca*," and starting thence for his deserted home. Where were those long hours spent?

"Have you learned from Luigi at what hour his master returned home last night, or this morning rather, Francesca?" she asked of the maid, who was arranging her thin and scanty hair.

"It wanted some three hours to dawn, my lady, old Bindo, the porter, says, when he opened the door for his excellency. Luigi is heavy-headed with his night-watch, and is yet a-bed, being sure that his excellency will not yet need his attendance. The pious brotherhood, my lady, which my lord has lately joined, do prolong their saintly exercises, Luigi says, beyond all reason, begging your ladyship's pardon. He says, saving your ladyship's presence, that if godliness keeps such hours, he had rather have any master than a devout one."

"Know you where the confraternity, whose devotions my lord attends, holds its meetings?" demanded the duchess, frowning heavily.

"In Borgo Pinti, my lady, near the Church of Sant' Ambrogio. It is under the invocation of the holy hermit St. Anthony. They do say, my lady, that the thongs of the 'disciplines' are stiff with blood by the time they give over their holy exercises."

"Silly tales for such silly women as you, Francesca. Tell Luigi, when he next fools you with any such stories, that you know better than to believe him."

The Duchess Veronica felt an uncontrollable desire to know more. Who was the woman for whose love the proud and pleasure-loving Salviati could submit to association with a rabble of absurd or hypocritical devotees, and to participation in their mummeries? The unhappy lady, brooding gloomily and bitterly, was pondering, as she sat listlessly before her glass, on the possibility of making this discovery, when the packet, despatched overnight by the Contessa Cecilia, was brought into her chamber, and placed in her hands by one of her tire-women.

"A packet, my lady, which was left early this morning, before any of your ladyship's women were up. Porter Bindo has just given it to me. The bearer said that he was instructed not to wait for any answer."

The duchess looked at the large coarse writing of the superscription, and concluded that the envelope contained the petition of some mendicant for charity. She felt but little inclined at that moment to do aught to relieve the sorrows of any human being. She tore off the cover, with a savage satisfaction at the prospect of an opportunity of revenging, even on an unknown beggar, the smart which made her at enmity with all the world; and read greedily, breathlessly, while a ghastly paleness spread itself over her face, and her heart seemed to suspend its action. She had read but the first line or two, when, with a ferocious and cruel smile, her fingers clutched the little miniature in its case, and closed over it with a grasp as convulsing as if the throat of her enemy were beneath their pressure. But the letter was read with



the intensest avidity to the last word. The miserable woman then let it fall from her hands, and threw herself backward on the cushion of the large chair on which she sat, while the violent heaving of her bosom, the rapid contraction and distension of her nostrils, and the rush of the returning blood to brow, cheek, and neck, indicated the agony of passion that swept over her like tempest wind. And all the while she held the fatal portrait at arm's length before her, staring at the unopened case, which she seemed to lack courage to unclose.

By degrees the violence of the storm in her blood and brain subsided to a treacherous calm, and she remained for a few minutes as if lost in abstraction. Then silently motioning her women to leave her, she glanced round her as they left the chamber, as if to be sure that she was indeed alone, and then with a sudden spring forward, rapid and fierce as the bound of a tigress on its prey, she tore open the case of the picture, and fixing her distended eyes on the beautiful face in the pride of its youthful bloom, remained staring at it, as if it had blasted her sight like the head of a Medusa. Once again all the blood ran back to her bursting heart, as she gazed, and left a ghastly and livid paleness on her features, reflected in the glass before her in horrible contrast to the soft peach-bloom on the lovely girlish face in the fatal picture.

Notable was the difference of the effect produced in the two women, the Duchess Veronica and the Contessa Cecilia, by the comparison of their features with the disastrous beauty of that same portrait which had been made by each of them. No illusion softened to the despairing wife the truth of her discomfiture. The stake in her case was too tremendously great to permit any self-love or vanity to conceal for an instant the blasting truth. It was with her no mere triumph of coquetry, no itch for admiration, no question of whistling back a fickle lover to the lightly worn allegiance of an hour. It was her all, her life, the wreck of heart and soul, that were doomed by the fatal beauty of those girlish features.



would come when a stranger might ask in vain his way in Florence to San Pietro Scheraggio, he might have replied, perhaps, that the time might well come, nay, not improbably was at hand, when Florence should become even as Babylon, by reason of the wickedness of its people; but it assuredly would have appeared incredible to him that a free Tuscan senate should be sitting in the council-hall of the almost adjoining palace, not a few of whose members would have been puzzled to point out the site of one of the principal churches and monasteries of the city, still in part existing almost within a hundred yards of them. But Messer Giorgio Vasari, when planning for his patron Cosmo the building of the new "Uffizi," which was to contain and reunite all the "offices" and magistracies of the city, thought more of the regularity and fair proportions of his own work than of preserving the work of his predecessors. And the venerable old church, once glorious with its three grand naves, its cloister, its cemetery, its infinite number of sepulchral monuments inscribed with the records of the old fathers of the republic, was pared away, and hustled, and built up, and effectually hidden by the fine new Palladian, or rather Vassarian front of the new building. The door of the diminished church—now church no more—fashioned to match the other doors under the colonnade, and like them opening off it, is rarely opened now. When the persons of this history were living and making the misery of each other by their vices, passions, and follies, the new door of the old church more frequently stood open, and St. Peter in the Ditch, though hidden as now, was sufficiently well known to the Florentines; church-going made a much larger part of the daily life in Florence in those days than it does in these.

It was the vigil of some festival. A few long slender candles on the principal altar, and here and there the glimmer of a lamp hanging before an image of the Virgin, barely prevented the church from being in total darkness. Yet there was a congregation of worshippers, and a drowsy hum of

litanies rose and fell on the ear in the cadences of a monotonous chant. In the immediate vicinity of the scattered shrine-lamps there was a little oasis of feeble light, within the circumference of which the features of some hood-shadowed face were rendered visible, or the bald crown of some aged penitent glistened white as the twinkling ray rested on it. But the remoter parts of the church lay in deep shadow; infinite were the capricious effects of light and shade produced by the multiform irregularities, projecting pilasters, receding chapels, and isolated columns of the building; and strangely picturesque the uncertain outline of groups and figures in the dim chiaroscuro. The majority of those present were doubtless there for a religious object, for the earning that is—cheaply enough, inasmuch as no domestic circle or pleasant occupation was deserted for the purpose, and lamp-oil was saved the while—of the indulgences promised as the reward of attendance there. But the social habits of that period were such as to amply justify the statement that many of the dimly visible figures who lurked behind pillars, or crouched on the steps of distant altars, were intent on matters calculated to make future penance necessary, rather than on performing that due for former sins. In either case it was all good for the trade of the place, and these chiaroscuro services, despite the notorious scandals to which they gave rise, were accordingly much in favour with the priesthood.

Among those who were evidently not there to pray, nor even to take part in the mechanical routine which passed for praying, was, on the evening in question, a thickly-veiled female figure, which had posted itself in the shadow of a column just outside the edge of one of the light-circles that have been described. There were several places vacant on the faldstools, on which the light fell just in front of her; but she preferred to remain standing in the obscurity. It was observable, too, that she was entirely alone; a solecism in the etiquette of the period which no woman of respectable position, whatever her general conduct or special errand, permitted

herself. It seemed, too, as if she had ventured on this step for the purpose of meeting some one, for her glance was continually turned towards the door with a movement indicative of nervous expectation. Many quitted the church, or entered it, and passed on to places in distant parts of it. Still the veiled figure kept her post impassibly in the shade of her column ; so it was evident that, if she were really waiting for somebody, she was sure that the expected person would come to the spot at which she had taken up her station.

At length two women entered, and came straight to the seats in the light in front of the veiled figure. No sooner had they reached the spot where the light fell on their features, than it became evident that they were, or that one of them was, the object of her watch. Both the new comers, the mistress and the maid, for such they clearly were, were young and handsome, the former very eminently so. Crossing themselves, they kneeled at one of the faldstools, and at once proceeded methodically to recite the appointed offices ; while the woman who had been awaiting their coming, stretching forward her head from out the shadow, gazed intently on the lovely face before her. For a while she seemed entirely absorbed in the contemplation of it. Then suddenly drawing up her figure, and throwing up her eyes with an expression of earnest prayer, her lips moved with some words of eager supplication that assuredly were not written in hymn-book or missal ; and suddenly, with a swift movement, she knelt by the side of the beautiful young woman she had been observing with so strange an expression. And turning her face towards her, so that her lips were within a few inches of the other's ear, but still keeping her veil down, in a deep whisper she said through her closed teeth :

“Caterina Canacci, daughter of Pasquale Bassi, the dyer I, Veronica, Duchess of San Giuliano, am here to warn you., In mercy I warn you, though no mercy have you deserved from me, and none shall you find, if the warning be in vain. Baseborn ! You have dared to contaminate with your mer-

cenary love a noble family. Now listen ! If the duke come again to your house of infamy, so use the meeting that it be the last. Should he come a second time, and you admit him within your door                      pass quickly to your shrift, for your doom will have been signed. I, the wife of Jacopo Salviati, now pronounce it, and will execute it."

Having thus spoken, she rose from her knees and hurried from the church.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE FIRST ACT OF THE LADY VERONICA'S "LITTLE COMEDY."

CATERINA had slunk back to her home, as soon as her accuser had vanished, overpowered with shame and terror. She was well aware that Salviati had taken careful precautions to secure the secrecy of his visits to the Via dei Pilastrì, and that he attached much importance to the concealment of their intimacy from the world. And of course it was not difficult to divine that the duchess was of all persons the last whose ears he would have wished the guarded secret to reach. What power of working woe to her, or perhaps even to Jacopo himself, this great and lofty lady might possess—what shape the vengeance of an outraged wife, of such high place and rank, might take—was all misty and uncertain to Caterina, and more terrible from its undefined vagueness. She felt keenly enough the greatness of her unpardonable offence against the duchess; and could not help wondering at the moderation which was content to warn before it struck. But, that the dreadful discovery of her relations with the duke must have the effect of putting an end to them, she could not doubt. And she contemplated, with an agony almost equal to that felt by the duchess herself, the certainty that her next interview with her lover would be the last—with an agony almost equal, but not quite, for some of the elements which

intensified the bitterness of the cup to the duchess were absent from that of Caterina.

The Lady Veronica had wronged her humbly-born rival in one phrase of the passionate denunciation she had hurled against her in the church. Her love for Jacopo was not "mercenary." It may have been that those first profoundly corrupt corruptors of her early innocence had, as one of them cynically avowed, brought Salviati to the Casa dei Canacci from purely mercenary motives. But the love which had grown up between her and Jacopo Salviati was not a mercenary, but—though an unhallowed—a true love on either side. When the Duca di San Giuliano married the Lady Veronica Cybo, and when Caterina Bassi accepted the hand of old Signor Canacci, both had been guilty of mercenary love—in such sense as mercenary motives can ever be predicated of that much-misused word; they had both, from mercenary motives, pretended to love. If no princely marriages, and no "assured bed and board," no "great matches," in short, had come in the way, the love of Jacopo and Caterina might have been a heaven-blessed union. But there was the fatal error in the top line of the sum, and the whole column of figures was necessarily, therefore, irremediably wrong to the end!

That next visit of the duke to Casa Canacci followed very shortly upon the terrible one from the duchess; and, as may be easily imagined, was *not* the last. Caterina was astonished at the smallness of the effect which the terrible tidings she had looked forward with such dread to telling, produced upon her lover. Jacopo appeared to be more angry than alarmed. He muttered something about his precautions of secrecy having been more for the duchess's own sake than for his own. As for Caterina's share in the matter, it did not seem to strike him that any harm either in fame or fortune could come to her from its being known that she was the favoured and exclusive mistress of so great a Sultan as the Duca di San Giuliano. And as things-ordinarily went in the world in

which they were both living, he was probably not far wrong in so deeming of her position. The Lady Veronica Cybo was, it must be admitted, a phenomenon much out of place in that world, and one calculated to throw its usual reckonings and ways not a little out of their ordinary track. The extent, however, to which it was capable of doing so, the Florentine world and Salviati himself had yet to learn. And he had little difficulty in soothing Caterina's alarm, and teaching her to look on the threats of the duchess as the impotent ill-temper of an unreasonable woman.

So the duke's visits to the Casa Canacci were as frequent as ever ; and the sole result of the extraordinary step taken by the duchess appeared to be that they were less carefully guarded from the suspicions of the world. To Salviati himself, his wife had said no word alluding to Caterina, to her discoveries respecting her, or to her own visit to the church of San Pietro Maggiore. She was only more than ordinarily gloomy and silent ; and the fits of violent passion, upbraiding and entreaty which had from time to time made his home intolerable to the light-hearted libertine, altogether ceased. There was a dead lull in Casa Salviati, which led him to think that, *per Baco!* it would have been better never to have attempted any concealment from his wife at all.

\* \* \* \* \*

One morning, about the middle of December, still in that same year 1638, the Duchess Veronica said to her tire-woman, Francesca, as the latter was about to leave the room after having completed her mistress's toilette :

"Is thy brother Beppo the fringe-maker still in the same house he occupied last year, Francesca ?"

"He is, so please you, signora, and his business thrives well there."

"That is well. I am pleased to hear it. Now listen to me. To-day thou wilt go down into the city to pay a visit to thy brother ; say to him that I have need of a private chamber in which to receive the visit of a person whom it does not suit



me to see here, or at the palazzo in town. I know that I can trust both him and thee. Thou mayst fancy, if thou wilt," she added, with a dreary attempt at a smile, "that I, too, have a love-affair a-foot, and need a trysting-place to meet my cavalier ; but that is no business of thine or of thy brother. I need the accommodation but for an hour, say, at the Ave Maria to-morrow evening, and I am sure he will manage to provide me with it."

"Assuredly, my lady. Beppo will be only too proud to do your ladyship's bidding in that or any other thing your ladyship may condescend to order him. Your ladyship will excuse the meanness of the chamber. He will do his best, as in duty-bound ; but I doubt he has no accommodation fit to offer to your ladyship."

"Let him not put himself to any trouble. Four bare walls, my child, even if there be not so much as a chair in them, so they secure privacy, will suffice for my need. Now go ! Let me hear this has been arranged when you return to the villa. The sole object of your going is to visit your brother by my permission—you understand."

"I understand your ladyship. Many thanks to your ladyship for the holiday !" added the well-drilled waiting-woman, as if to show her readiness to act out a lie in all its details at the shortest notice.

"And Francesca !"

"Yes, my lady."

"Tell Pippo Carrarrese to come to me here. I wish to speak to him."

"Yes, my lady." Francesca vanished, to don in all haste her best skirt and mantle for her welcome trip to Florence, wondering much on what business her mistress could possibly be bound.

In a few minutes Pippo Carrarrese stood before his mistress. Philip was, as that nickname of his—the only name he had beyond his baptismal one—indicated, a native of Carrara ; and as such a born subject of the Prince of Massa, the Lady

Veronica's father. He was one of those retainers, half military, half menial, who were to be found in every princely house, attached to the more immediate service of their lords—men whose whole pride and self-respect consisted in believing themselves, as well as their despot masters, to be superior to and exempt from laws, which were made, according to their theory, only for the subject herd who lived outside ducal and baronial castles—men whose sole virtue was hound-like fidelity to their keepers, and perfect readiness to obey their behests, let them be what they might, from carrying a billet to murdering a bishop before the altar. Philip of Carrara had been “given” to the Lady Veronica by her noble father, when she left his court as Salviati's wife, and he was considered in the Salviati household as her especial retainer and servitor. He was a grey and grisly-looking man of some sixty years of age; and now stood, cap in hand and silent, before the duchess, waiting her commands.

“Get thee into the saddle, Pippo, and make the best of thy way to the Osteria del Giardino, in the Via dei Pilastri. There give the host this paper, and bid him point out to thee the man named thereon. When thou hast assured thyself that only two ears are listening to thee, say to that man that a person of quality—a lady, thou mayst say—wishes to speak with him on matters concerning his interest. Give him these gold pieces, as earnest of more to be had from the sender of them. Bid him hold himself in readiness to accompany thee when thou shalt call for him to-morrow evening about the Ave Maria. This done, return hither to me. Have you understood?”

“Perfectly, your ladyship. I take for certain that I am to speak no word as to the person I serve, and to wear no badge of the house.”

“Right, my friend. Also let none here know the scope of thy errand. Here is money to drink a cup with the host. Now go!”

And the second messenger to the city from the Villa Salviati departed on his errand.

The duchess, when left alone, began walking to and fro in her chamber, as she has been described to have done on a former occasion. But her frame of mind was now a very different one.

"Now let me think!" she muttered to herself, as she pressed the ends of the fingers of one hand on her heavily-frowning forehead. "Or rather," she continued, "let me not think, but act. Of thinking there has been, Heaven wots, enow! The course before me is straight—straight and clear! The judgment has been pronounced—surely a righteous judgment—I am henceforward but the minister for its execution. What next is to be done? Ay, doing! that is the thing needed. Would that the hours could all be filled with action! The letter to my brother! That may be done at once. The letter to my noble and trusty brother!"

She sat down at a writing-table, and having written rapidly a few lines, placed them in an envelope, and addressed it to "The most Illustrious and Noble Prince Don Carlo Cybo, his own hands."

And then the nervous weary walking was recommenced; and the disobedient brain would think over and over again the thoughts which the will had decided on dismissing; and it seemed as if the hours which must elapse before the next step in the action for which the duchess was so eager could be taken, would never wear themselves away.

At length the close of the following day was reached, and the duchess, closely veiled, and attended only by Pippo, proceeded to the house of the fringe-maker, where she was obsequiously but silently ushered into a small room at the back of the house on the first floor.

"Now," she said to her follower, as she alighted at the door of the obscure house, "go to your appointment in the Via dei Pilastri, and bring the man here. Tell him he will see no one, save a lady alone, and that money is to be had for the coming to fetch it."

Then began again the restless pacing backwards and

forwards of the few steps possible in the little room in which she found herself.

In about half an hour, which seemed to her impatience three hours at least, there came heavy steps up the stair and a tap at the door, and Pippo silently ushered into the room the drunkard son of Caterina's aged husband, Bartolommeo Canacci.

If the five years which has passed between Signor Giustino Canacci's marriage and the year 1638 had changed him from a hale old man to a half bedridden dotard, the alteration for the worse which they had worked in his son was yet greater. He was already, at thirty years of age, a mere wreck. Long-continued habits of intemperance had so seasoned and yet at the same time shaken his nervous system, that he could hardly be said to be ever drunk, or ever sober. With trembling legs, and palsied hands, blear-eyed, haggard, bloated and blotched in face, he was as unprepossessing an object as it is possible to imagine. And as he shuffled into the room where the duchess was awaiting him, with a stupid look of half-awakened curiosity mixed with a would-be defiant swagger, it needed an effort on her part so far to overcome the disgust he occasioned her, as to enter on the business with him which had brought her there.

Motioning him with her hand to sit on the opposite side of a little table in the centre of the room to that at which she seated herself as he entered, "Signor Bartolommeo Canacci," she began, in a slow, clear, magisterial kind of voice, "are you aware that the good name of your respectable and honourable house has been destroyed and made a byword in Florence?"

"Shouldn't wonder, lady fair, whoever you are. They are a bad lot in Casa Canacci, the old father and the young mother-in-law—a bad lot, fit to break an honest man's heart. But you know the song—

When there 's sorrow in thinking,  
Then there 's wisdom in drinking.

If it was not for practising that wisdom I should have gone to the church, heels foremost, long ago. But what have you got to say in the matter ? ”

“ This I have to say, Bartolommeo Canacci. The vile abandoned woman whom your doting father made his wife, and who has made the shame of his life and the misery of yours, has also been the bane of mine.”

“ You don’t mean that ! Does she lock away every far-thing of money—money that should be your own—where you can’t get at it ? Does she keep you out of your own house ? Does she drive you to drink to get rid of care ? ”

“ I tell you she has done worse than all this to me. Homeless ! Yes, has she not made me homeless too ? For what is my home to me ! Man ! I hate Caterina Canacci as no human being ever hated another yet ! ”

“ Well, I am not much behind you in that matter, I’ll warrant me. We are two in a boat, so far. But the worthy gentleman who brought me here to your ladyship said something, if I am not mistaken, about some transaction in current coin to take place here this evening. Now, I don’t think it likely, upon the whole, that he could have alluded to any disbursement to be made by me to your ladyship.”

“ Are you in want of money ? ”

“ A pretty question ! Why, who the devil is not in want of money ? Is not the grand-duke always wanting money ? Don’t I look as if I had as princely or saintly an appetite for coin as any duke in the land, or saint in the calendar ? ”

“ Do you like revenge on those who have injured you ? ”

“ Why, what a question again ! Do you like victuals when you are hungry ? Have you any taste for rest when you are weary ? Haven’t I told you already that I hate one or two, mayhap ? Yes ! ” and his half-bantering, half-maudlin manner changed suddenly to an expression of brutal ferocity, while a dangerous gleam lighted up for a moment his dull dead eyes. “ Yes, I *do* like revenge :

perhaps, if I got a taste of it, should like it better than anything else to be had in this dog-hole of a world."

"Right, friend! I like it best of anything in all the world." The duchess returned fixedly the cruel wolfish glare that shot from under his sullen overhanging brow, looking into his eyes with a gleam of hate as fierce and deadly as his own. "And," she continued, after a pause, "we hate the same person."

The bloodshot eye of the commonplace ruffian deadened and fell beneath the intensity of vindictive passion concentrated in the face of the duchess. The lower nature and deteriorated organisation of the man was dominated and almost daunted by the superior energy and strength of will of the woman. The wretched drunkard wanted sundry things, after all, more than gratification of his hatred. Hatred is a spiritual passion. The body has no craving for it. And with the degraded sot, his body and its cravings had to be served before any needs of the spirit, however low and ignoble in their nature, could be heard. Drink, and wherewithal to procure it, was infinitely more necessary to him than the luxury of revenge. With the Lady Veronica it was otherwise. She spoke less than the whole truth, when she said that she loved revenge better than anything else in all the world. She might, with truth, have said that it was the only thing for which she cared and lived; that all else had become vanity, emptiness, and indifference. And yet the Lady Veronica was a mother, and had been a passionately loving wife. But it may be doubted whether she would *now* have bartered the prospect of revenge on her rival, even for the restoration of her husband's affection. For in such organisations as that of the duchess, vindictive hate is like the serpent which was generated from the rod of the prophet. No sooner had it been quickened in the soul, than it grows with awful rapidity to monstrous stature, and devours every other passion, and desire and affection.

The flame of passion, therefore, that the lady's words had suddenly kindled in Bartolommeo's heart sunk down again as

suddenly ; cowed and quenched by the intenser passion that blazed in her own.

"But, may be," continued the duchess, perceiving the quick burning out of the straw fire she had raised, "may be you feel inclined to be indulgent to this gay young mother-in-law ? Perhaps you can not only forgive her for rendering your present life one of shifts and poverty, and making you a homeless vagabond, but are content that she should play out her game successfully to the end, be mistress of the old man's house and property while he lives, and inherit all when he dies ? Perhaps your feeling is, that after all it will be best to content yourself for the remainder of your days with such *palms* as the bankrupt dyer's daughter and her paramours may throw you from time to time out of the contents of the old man's coffers ? I thought I saw something in your eye a moment since, which looked as if you were not exactly the man to bend your neck to such a lot, and lick the hand which flings you a grudging pittance out of your own goods. But perhaps I was mistaken in my estimate."

A blacker scowl settled heavily on Bartolommeo's repulsive features, as the duchess spoke ; but the fierce blaze of passion did not return to them. A long pause ensued, during which he seemed to be thinking, as far as his besotted and shattered mind was capable of thought. At last he answered :

"If your ladyship has no particular objection, I think we had better understand a little what the business in hand is, before we talk any further. I was brought here to you. I did not seek you. You know what you want. I don't. You know who I am. You may be the Queen of Sheba, for all I know of you. You want something of me. I have still to learn what it is. You did not bring me here, I suppose, merely to ask if I liked money and if I liked revenge ? And as to what you say about my cursed mother-in-law—a bad death and a short shrift to her !—inheriting all the property, and my submitting to it ; why, look you, the case stands thus ; and as there are only four eyes\* here present, there is no

\* "A quattr' occhi" is a favourite Tnscon expression for a tête-à-tête

good reason against stating the case plainly. If I had thought it worth my while to cut her throat for the sake of paying off old scores, and preventing her standing between me and the old man's money, why I should have done it. You, I take it, for some reason or other, would like to have her throat cut, unless your hate is so dainty-stomached as to look for the treat of burning her alive. But I am not likely to do for you what I did not do long ago for myself. I have no taste for feeling the bargello's fingers about my neck. The game is too dangerous, do you see, for my liking."

The duchess, on her side, paused awhile, considering her reply to this address. She bit her lip, rose from her chair, and took one or two turns up and down the little chamber before she decided on her course of action. Then, seating herself again on the side of the table opposite to him, she said:

"— There is, as you say, no reason why the whole matter in hand should not be plainly spoken between us. I have no wish to take an unfair advantage of you by remaining unknown to you, while I know you. I am the Duchess of San Giuliano."

Bartolommeo started, and lifted his hand to his hat, rising as he did so, and striving to remember whether he had said anything that could be dangerous to him—said in such a presence. The duchess motioned to him to reseal himself, and continued:

"I have told you that I hate Caterina Canacci, and you may probably be now at no loss to comprehend why I hate her. But you have mistaken me in supposing that my anger against her would lead me to take, or to wish taken, any such measures as you have alluded to. They are too dangerous, as you well remark, even if one wished to be guilty of murder. No. My project of revenge limits itself simply to the infliction of shame, and exposure, and the consequent cessation of—relations, which—are—loathsome to me." A choking sensation in her throat made the utterance of the last words difficult to the Lady Veronica. "I purpose," she went



on, "introducing a number of persons into the house, good friends of mine, at an hour when she shall be caught in the midst of her infamous revels ; when your father will be, shall be, made aware of his own dishonour, and of the character of his wife, and her public shame and disgrace shall become the byword of the town."

"Is that all, my lady ? To my mind it seems a rather tasteless dish of vengeance for a hungry stomach. But then I am but a plain man. What is it that your honourable ladyship wants of me in the matter ? Now your ladyship has condescended to tell me your ladyship's name, you know, of course, that I am at your service."

"What I want of you, Signor Canacci, is simply this : It would be difficult for the friends I spoke of to obtain entrance at the right moment without making much more disturbance than is desirable. The door would undoubtedly be shut and barred against them. I look to you to have it opened. My friends shall keep out of sight under the shelter of the wall, while you alone ask admittance ; and when the door is opened they will enter with you."

"In all that, your ladyship, I see no difficulty at all. It will, at all events, make la Caterina pass a bad half-hour enough. Egad ! I should like the fun. But your honourable ladyship will no doubt understand that, though there be in such a matter no such consequences to be feared as if the question were of throats to be cut, still it is likely enough that my connivance may be called in question, to my loss, and it was probably in view of such a risk that your ladyship was so considerate as to speak, by the mouth of the worthy gentleman who brought me hither, of moneys to be had in recompense for my attendance here ? "

"Those who serve me are not wont to remain unpaid, or to grumble at the rate of their payment."

"No doubt ; but it was with reference to that part of the business in hand, that your ladyship condescended to inquire at the beginning of this conversation whether I were in need

of money. Permit me, *eccellentissima signora*,\* to repeat, that I am in truth very greatly in need—indeed in urgent need—of some small supply.”

“Remember, Signor Bartolommeo, that in carrying out this little scheme you will be in a very important degree serving your own interest. For it is not likely that the old man your father, when he shall have been made acquainted with the conduct of his wife, and shall know that the dishonour she has done him has been made the common talk of the town, will persist in disinheriting his son to enrich his widow.”

“Most true, *signora mia colendissima*!† If Ser Giustino have still sense and self-respect enough to feel his position as he ought—which, alas! may be much doubted—such a result would be likely to follow. But all that is uncertain, very uncertain. . . . And my needs are certain and pressing.”

“And I repeat that they shall be cared for liberally. Now, mark me well! The day and hour when this little comedy shall be played out, is not yet fixed. It shall be played very shortly; as soon as I have arranged the matter with the knot of friends who are to be the chief performers. You are to hold yourself in readiness to do your part any evening on which you may be called on. You are in the habit, I suppose, of being seen in the house from time to time?”

“Now and then . . . Rarely enough, to tell your ladyship the truth. I am not received there in a manner to make my visits very frequent.”

“But they are sufficiently so, I presume, for you to be known to the servant, and to be sure of not being refused admittance?”

\* According to the ceremonial of that time, the only personages for whom the title of *Eccellentissima* was reserved, in Tuscany, were the Dukes Strozzi and Salviati. It shortly afterwards became almost universal.

† The phrase may be tolerably accurately rendered by “your most worshipful ladyship.”

"Oh! for that matter, yes, your ladyship. They could hardly refuse to open my father's door to me."

"Very good. Perhaps it would be well to drop in two or three times during the next week or so, and comport yourself in a manner to show the woman that she has nothing to fear from you. Be quiet, inoffensive, sober—you understand me? Then you have nothing further to do than to await my summons. It shall be brought you by the man who conducted you hither. My friends will be ready in their hiding-place. A dark night shall be selected. You will cause the door to be opened. That is all that is required of you. My friends will do the rest. Have you marked me?"

"Every word, your most excellent ladyship. I shall not fail to be ready for your orders."

"Let it be understood, then, that you will be found any evening, without the necessity of any further communication, at the Osteria del Giardino. You will know the man with whom you spoke to-day? To make all certain, he shall say, when he calls for you, 'The comedy for to-night is Love's Revenge.' That shall be your pass-word. Now take this purse. When the trick has been played, you shall not want for more. So it is all understood and agreed?"

"In every point, most gracious lady," said Bartolommeo, rising and making a profound bow. "Doubt not that all shall be done accurately, according to your orders. I shall be found at the Osteria."

"Enough," said the duchess, rising also. "Of course," she added, "it will be necessary to let fall no word of this little plan, or of this interview, till the play has been played out. Afterwards I care not. To speak before would only spoil the scheme, and lose you many a purse hereafter such as that now in your hand."

"Of course, your ladyship. What am I that such a caution should be needed!"

"Good! Send me the man who called you to me. You will find him below."

And the duchess returned up the hill to the villa, grimly satisfied with the result of her interview, and specially with the change she had made in the mode of conducting it, as soon as she had discovered the manner of man she had to deal with.

As she alighted at the door of her home, she drew a letter from her bosom, the same which she had written and addressed to her brother, and turning to her faithful servitor Pippo, said :

“Saddle for Massa to-morrow morning. Deliver this into the hands of my brother. Wait for his orders before returning. Speak to none here of your errand.”

Old Pippo bowed and took the letter in silence. The duchess mounted to her room to count the hours till the next act in her “little comedy” should be ready for performance.

## CHAPTER VI.

### ANOTHER EVENING IN CASA CANACCI.

THE letter which Pippo Carrarrese carried to Massa ran as follows :—

“Most excellent Prince and dear Brother,—This letter will be delivered into your honoured hands by our faithful Pippo, whose trustiness is known to you. Of myself and of things here I have little that is good or agreeable to tell you. Foul and dishonourable wrong has been done me. And it is not to a prince of our name and blood that it is necessary to tell the care which is now occupying me. I might enter into the particulars of that which is on my heart, sure of your sympathy, support, and assistance. But, under the circumstances, I think it best to do what has to be done, alone. You may be quite sure that the honour of our family is safe in my keeping, and that I know how to vindicate it. The purport of the present,

therefore, is to request you, my brother, to send back with Pippo, under his guidance and orders, three trusty men—let them be *men*, you understand me—devoted to our family. Let them be well mounted to ride at need—men with ready hands and silent tongues. For the present there needs no more to be said. May God have you in his holy keeping, my brother.

“Your loving and dutiful sister,

“VERONICA.”

The result of this letter was, that on a dark evening, towards the latter end of December, Pippo, accompanied by three other well-mounted but unarmed men of his own class and sort, presented themselves at the Prato gate of Florence. The gate had been already some time closed. But on the strangers making themselves known as servants of the duchessa, they were readily allowed to enter the city. Pippo conducted his men to a small hostelry, situated in one of the narrow streets behind the Palazzo Vecchio, in the immediate neighbourhood of the Mercato Vecchio—which was kept by a Massa man, and was accordingly well known to the Villa Salviati people, and frequented by all the Massa and Carrara folks, whom the connexion of the duchess with that country or any other circumstance brought to Florence.

Having housed them, Pippo at once started for the villa, to report his return to the duchess, and receive her orders. They were, that for the present, he should only hold himself and the three Massa men in readiness, supply them quietly with arms from the villa, and caution them strictly not to be seen in the city, to keep close in their quarters during the day, and leave them, if at all, only after nightfall.

These matters duly arranged, the duchess had again to wait, with such patience as she could master, the further development of her designs.

The last day of the year is a day of note in Catholic countries. Among men of every persuasion, indeed, the close of one of the stages of the life so rapidly hurrying away, cannot but be felt as having a certain degree of solemnity attached to it. And men "keep it," accordingly, with observances which differ as their temperaments and characters differ. It becomes a festival or a fast, not as the retrospect of the year that is already so rapidly floating away down the stream into the gulf of the infinite past is in any degree satisfactory or the reverse, but as it is Heraclitus or Democritus who makes it.

The Church pronounces the day a fast-day, in that it is the vigil of the feast-day of the new year. And all those good sons of the Church who make a point of complying with her ordinances, especially the pious confraternities, whose scope and usages have been described, obediently observe it as such accordingly. On such an occasion it might be supposed that the devout Duke of San Giuliano, whose attendance at the meetings of his confraternity had been so exemplarily regular, would not have failed to avail himself of the opportunity of assuming his penitential gown and hood as usual. But he did not do so. And it would seem that the certainty that he would not visit the *Via dei Pilastri* on that night, was the occasion for which the duchess was waiting for the further prosecution of her "little comedy." For, notwithstanding what she had said to Bartolommeo about the exposure and shame she intended to inflict upon Caterina, it did not appear to enter into her plans, whatever they were, to put them in execution when the duke was there. In any case, it is certain that Salviati was not in the house of his mistress on the night of that 31st of December, 1638, and that he did on that night sleep at home, in *Villa Salviati*.

It is further especially recorded by the contemporary chroniclers that Signore Vincenzo Carlini and Signore Jacopo Serselli were with Caterina in *Casa Canacci* on that evening. Under all the circumstances of the case, it certainly appears strange that they should have been there, especially in Sal-

viati's absence. The fact may be taken as an illustration the more of the social habits and feelings of the time. But it probably should not be understood to cast any further reproach on the unfortunate Caterina than is inseparable from the mere circumstance of her permitting these men, situated as she was with regard to them, to come there to sup and make merry. Salviati, it might be thought, ought to have protected her against any such associations—more especially as there does not seem any reason to believe that their presence there was kept secret from him.

Be this as it may, on that night Carlini and Serselli were with Caterina in Casa Canacci, and the aged husband was fast asleep upstairs as usual, when, about the third hour after the Ave Maria, a knocking was heard at the door. The servant-girl, Nina—who was such a treasure, we remember—went upstairs to a window from which she could look down over the door, and called out to ask who was there. People in those days in Florence did not open their doors after sundown without precautions.

“A friend!” cried the voice of Bartolommeo from below, making the customary reply to the question. “Open the door, Nina; it’s all right.”

“Ah, but Signor Bartolommeo, it is not always all right when you come to the house o’ nights at such hours. Are you sure you are sober?—that is to say, as near sober as ever you are. Will you behave yourself decently, and not wake up the old man?”

“Don’t you see I am as sober as a bishop? A great deal soberer than some of them are at this moment, I’ll be bound.”

“But what is it you want, Signor Bartolommeo? It is getting late, and my mistress will be going to bed directly,” persisted Nina, who seemed to have more misgiving than usual about letting her master’s son into the house, although in obedience to the suggestions of the duchess he had, in his recent visits, taken unusual care to behave inoffensively.

"What do I want?" returned Bartolommeo, speaking in apparently perfect good temper; "why, to pay my compliments to the Signora Caterina on this of all nights in the year. Come, Nina, open the door, there is a good girl, and don't keep me standing here in the cold any longer. I told the Signora Caterina that I should look in this evening."

Now Nina knew very well that when Bartolommeo came thus to the door, the usual alternative was to admit him or to have a dreadful disturbance in the street, calling the neighbours to their windows, and generally waking up old Signor Giustino: all which would have been exceedingly inconvenient, for many reasons, under the circumstances. So she replied from the window,—

"Well, then, Signor Bartolommeo, if you will promise not to wake Signor Giustino . . . He was fractious enough to-night, I can tell you, and the Holy Virgin knows the trouble we had in getting him to sleep! . . . I will come down to the door directly. The fact is, the signora has some friends to supper to-night, and——"

"I know that very well! I know all about it! For whom do you take me? I shall only drink just one cup in all good fellowship with Signor Carlini and his friends."

"Well, I am coming," returned Nina, cautiously shutting the window from which she had held the colloquy.

She ran first, however, into the room downstairs, where Caterina and her guests were seated at the supper-table, to warn them of the intruder's coming.

"There 's Signor Bartolommeo at the door my lady, seeking admittance. I tried to send him away, but it was no use. He seems sober, for a wonder. He knows that these gentlemen are here, and says he only wants to drink a cup in good fellowship with them, and pay his respects to your ladyship. I suppose I must let him in. We shall have the devil to pay in the street else!"

"Oh! let the Signor Bartolommeo come in by all means!" cried both the gentlemen. "He will go to the pothouse and



tell all sorts of tales else. Better let him come in, and keep him in good humour."

"You are sure he is alone, Nina?" asked Caterina.

"Oh! for that, my lady, yes! I looked up the street and down the street. There's not a soul stirring."

"Well! I suppose you must let him come in, then," returned her mistress.

And Nina went to open the door.

"We will keep him quiet, this terrible son-in-law; never fear. And we will see him safe out before we go, cara mia!" said Carlini.

"But how would it be," said Serselli, "if he were to take it into his drunken head to come here when . . . we know who is here?"

„The duke," replied Caterina, blushing slightly, and with a little toss of her pretty head. "He knows better, I think, than to interfere with Jacopo Salviati. It would be as much as his ears are worth!"

Nina had, as she said, looked up and down the street, as she stood speaking with Bartolommeo at the window, and she seen no one but him standing out in the street, and barely visible, even so, in the unlighted darkness of the winter night. Even had she thought of turning her eyes down to the foot of the wall, she would have been unable to distinguish two figures on either side of the door wholly muffled in cloaks of dark colour, and standing close with their backs against the wall, in the additional darkness caused by the wide overhanging eaves of the roof.

Poor Nina! Signor Vincenzo Carlini had said she was „invaluable"; that he had placed her in her present position for the sake of those precious talents of hers. She exercised them, it is to be supposed, to the best of her lights, or rather, as best she might, in the utter absence of any glimmer of light! And now her little part in the great drama was done, and her uses over. Her patron, Signor Vincenzo, was reserved for an old age of reformation, respectability, and

reverent authority. Did he ever think, it may be wondered, in those after years, of the fate of the poor girl, whose *bohème* existence came to so different a termination from his own !

Nina proceeded to open the door cautiously, as we have seen her do it on a former occasion. But no sooner was the bolt withdrawn than the door was violently pushed against her, and four men, hurling Bartolommeo headforemost in before them, rushed in behind him. The shock of the surprise was so great as to take from her the power of crying out for an instant. And in that instant the lamp she carried was knocked out, a cloak was suddenly thrown over her head, and a stiletto stab was dealt her in the bosom by so practised a hand that it reached the heart, and ended her life without a struggle or a groan.

While one of the four ruffians was thus engaged, two others seized Bartolommeo, and, holding their daggers to his throat, signed to him to be silent as he cared for his life ; the fourth carefully closed the open door. All this was done so quickly, deftly, and without confusion, that it was clear the whole action had been clearly arranged beforehand, and each actor appointed to his special part.

The next step was to proceed as noiselessly as possible to the room where Caterina was entertaining her guests. But in their total ignorance of the house, and in the darkness, the assassins did not succeed in accomplishing this. Bartolommeo seems to have been completely paralyzed by terror, and to have taken no part whatever in the scene which followed. The bravoes, in endeavouring to find their way in the darkness, made some noise in the passage, which caused Carlini and Serselli to come to the door of the supper-room, surprised that Nina did not return with Bartolommeo, and imagining that the delay and the noise were occasioned by some incivility or civility, offered by the latter to the pretty waiting-woman.

As soon as the door of the room in which they had been sitting was opened, the light streamed into the passage, which opened on the opposite side of a sort of inner hall or lobby.

The two cavaliers and the intruders, therefore, saw each other at the same moment, and the latter rushed forward towards the lighted room. But the stairs leading to the upper part of the house opened on the lobby close to the door of this chamber, and were thus between Caterina's guests and the strangers. A means of escape was thus offered to these gallant gentlemen, of which both instantly availed themselves. Leaving the unprotected Caterina to her fate, whatever it may be, at the hands of the ruffians, they rushed up the stairs, gained the roof, and thence reached that of the next house, into which they obtained admission. But not even then does it appear that they took any steps to obtain assistance, or to interfere in any way with what might be passing in the house they had just left; they simply established themselves at the window, and watched to see what might follow.

There were left, therefore, in Casa Canacci, old Ser Giustino, waked up from his sleep by the unwonted noise, and feebly calling from his bed to know what was the matter; Bartolommeo, almost paralyzed by terror and as helpless as his father; the dead body of the murdered girl lying in the entry; Caterina, in presence of Pippo Carrarrese and his three followers.

The first thought of the terrified woman was that the object of the attack on the house was simply robbery.

"Do me no harm, my friends," she said; "I will make no resistance. We are not rich people, and there is little of value in the house. Take what you will."

"Your goods are safe as far as we are concerned. We are not thieves," answered Pippo. "Our errand here is a different one. In brief, Caterina Canacci," he continued, speaking with the calm impassive air of an official announcing a judicial sentence, "you must die this night. Your last hour is nearly spent."

"Die!" shrieked the miserable woman, while her face became ghastly with livid pallor, and her eye was distended by terror; "die! Now! This night! Nay, you are frighten-

ing me in jest. But 'tis bad jesting." She looked from one to the other of the hard, pitiless faces round her, in search of some justification of her suggestion. But she found there no ray of hope. She read no passion-stirred ferocity in their faces, but simply quiet, grim, impassible determination.

"'Twere poor jesting, truly, if jest there were," returned Pippo; "but it is earnest, and it is certain, lady, that you must die this night, and this hour . . . ay! and within this quarter of an hour!"

"But it is impossible! I am not ready to die! I am not prepared! I have done no harm to any one. Nobody can wish my death!"

"My orders," resumed Pippo, in the same measured, cold tones, "are that you should be informed that you are condemned to die by the lady Veronica, Duchess of San Giuliano. The nature of your offence against that noble lady, you doubtless know. I have no orders to allow you time for preparation. Nevertheless, I give you five minutes to make your peace with God."

A visible convulsive shudder passed through the wretched woman's frame at the mention of the name of the duchess. The reality of her doom and its certainty seemed suddenly to flash into her mind. Flinging up her arms, and glancing wildly from side to side like a hunted animal, she suddenly made a spring towards the door. But a single quiet and rapid stride of one of her executioners placed him between her and it. Turning with the unreasoning impulse of mere animal terror, she made a bound towards the opposite window. A similar movement on the part of another of the ruffians again showed her the utter hopelessness of escape.

"Lady!" said Pippo, with the voice of one speaking a doom certain as fate, "one minute of the five is already gone. In four more, you die!"

"Jacopo! Jacopo! Why are you not here to save me? Jacopo, must I die for your love? Will you let me die, Jacopo? Help! Jacopo! Quick! quick! to save me! Have

you recollected," she continued, turning to Pippo, as a new possibility of hope dashed into her mind, "have you thought that the duke will assuredly avenge my death? Your own lives will pay for mine. Have you thought of that?"

"It is little we care for your Florentine duke or his anger. A dozen of such dukes could not save you from the vengeance of our lady!" said one of the Massa men, in the pride of his superiority to Florentine law.

But Pippo only repeated, in his doomster's voice:

"Lady! two minutes of the five are gone. You have but three more to live."

"How can I die!" she shrieked in anguish. "How can I die, so young? Why should I die? I am not ill! I am in health! Oh! God! I cannot die! Save me! Will no one come? Will no one tell Jacopo?" Then, with a sudden movement of her hands pressing back the long disordered tresses on either side of her forehead, as if she were striving to concentrate her thoughts on a new idea, she with two or three staggering steps reached Pippo's side, as he stood moodily frowning, with his arms folded under his cloak; and still holding her head between her hands, and leaning her forehead against his shoulder, said in a hoarse whisper, intended to be coaxing, "Now look! noble sir! see how much better it will be to save my life! Nobody shall ever know that I am alive! I will go away! go wherever you will now, now, while it is dark. No one will ever know it; let us go away! Jacopo Salviati will reward you nobly!" she added, with the inconsistency of a reeling brain; "Jacopo is generous, so generous! he will give you anything you can ask, if you save my life."

And her voice grew hoarser, and her words broken by laboured panting, as she urged her desperate pleading.

But Pippo shook his head gravely and slowly; and only said, "Lady, three minutes out of the five are gone. You have only two to live."

"But but in any case If I am to die"—and the words were panted forth brokenly, while

the sweat-drops gathered on her brow—"There must be a reprieve! There is a reason! . . . a reason why it cannot be that I should be put to death now! . . . not death now! I the truth" and the poor creature turned her face away, and stooping hid it in her shaking hands; "I have another life besides my own within me! It is the truth! Jacopo knows it is the truth! Therefore you see I cannot die to-night not put my baby to death . . . You see there must be a reprieve!"

"One minute only remains of the time allowed you to make your peace with God. Kneel to the Holy Virgin, and say at least a Paternoster for a passing prayer. Kneel!"

"Oh! God! to die! to die! I have done no wrong . . . I never sought I can't pray!"

But she knelt, as she had been bidden, there in the midst of the floor, holding up both clasped hands rather in the attitude, as it seemed, of prayer to her executioner than to Heaven. Pippo secretly made a sign to one of the other men; who, replying by an almost imperceptible movement of the head, noiselessly stepped behind her; and drawing from its sheath at his girdle a little triangularly-shaped dagger, and liberating his right arm from the folds of his cloak, stood ready to strike swiftly and surely.

The eye and entire attention of poor Caterina were directed to Pippo, who stood in front of her, and who alone had spoken during the terrible scene, with the exception of that one outburst of clannish defiance from one of the assassins, when the victim had threatened him with Salviati's vengeance. If in the mortal agony of her terror Caterina could be said to think at all, she thought that it was from Pippo that her death-blow would come. But she probably did not yet realize the fact that the last seconds of her life were quickly ebbing. Her vague impression probably was, that at the end of the minutes of whose lapse she had been so repeatedly warned, she should be definitively condemned; that her fate would then become certain. She strove, however, to fashion at least her lips to

prayer. What she would fain have prayed for was what in very truth and reality she earnestly desired, the present and immediate saving of her life. And it was to Pippo accordingly that her real prayer was addressed, as she knelt before him with her clasped hands upraised. But her lips recurred mechanically to the familiar formula, as to a conjuring spell connected in her poor dark mind with the idea of prayer. "Ave Maria, gratiâ plena! Dominus tecum!" she said; and as the last syllable escaped her lips, at a movement of Pippo's finger the dagger from behind was struck home unerringly. The hand which held it did its work well and skilfully. The steel entered the upstretched throat immediately above the collar-bone, and went straight to the heart.

It was not only because the granted time was up that Pippo gave the fatal sign at the moment he did. He belonged to a class of men, among whom religious faith, such as Rome inculcates, is apt to linger long after it has left other portions of the community. And it really was satisfactory to his conscience to think that he had so managed that his victim had the advantage of dying with holy words upon her lips.

"The stroke was well and workmanly struck, Nanni," he said; "there was no need of a second. Poveretta! How pretty she looked! Per Bacco! I don't marvel at the duke's taste? But the worst has to be done yet; and there is no time to be lost. Nanni and Carlo, see you to the body of the girl who was struck down in the entry, while Moro and I finish the job here."

The two men first addressed went out, and taking up the body of poor Nina, wrapped it in a cloak, and then cautiously opened the house door, and listened to hear if there was any movement in the street. All was perfectly still and dark, as if not a human being was alive in the city. And the two men, having assured themselves that all was still, took up the body, and bearing it between them a few paces down the street, towards the church of Sant' Ambrogio, threw it into a well which still exists at that spot.

Then returning to the house, they continued to watch at the door, while the man whom Pippo had addressed as Nanni called to the two who had remained in the inner room :

“Is not your business done yet? It is time we were off! The street is as quiet as death. Come!”

“Bear a hand here, Nanni,” returned Pippo. “You and Carlo carry the body—poor little thing! it is not heavy—to the same grave as the other. We are ready. Moro and I will close the door; and then to saddle!”

So the body of Caterina, wrapped, as the other had been, in a cloak, was carried out and thrown into the well; and the four men hurried off to seek their horses at the inn behind the Palazzo Vecchio. And it was afterwards sworn by the ostler who had had charge of the horses, in the course of the police investigations to which these events gave rise, that one of the men carried a sack beneath his cloak, which he never quitted for a moment, but mounted with it in his hand, and placed it before him at his saddle-bow.

Once beyond the city gate, the men rode fast up the hill to the Villa Salviati. There, at a small door in the garden-wall opening upon the little cypress grove, stood a woman in the deep shade, evidently anxiously waiting, despite the sharp cold. It was the Lady Veronica herself. The four men drew rein as they rode up to the little postern, and Pippo dismounted. The others took off their hats, but remained seated in their saddles.

“Speak!” said the duchess, in a short, hoarse whisper.

“The orders of your ladyship have been punctually executed,” returned Pippo.

“It is well! Give!” and she held out both hands towards the man.

“But, my lady!” stammered Pippo, producing the sack from beneath his cloak, “shall I                   ?”

“Give! Quick!” returned the lady, passionately. She received in both hands the sack from the apparently unwilling hand of the trooper.



"Now, ride for your lives ! Be beyond the Tuscan limits before the dawn. Away !"

The Lady Veronica ascended with firm steps to her chamber, greedily clutching the burden in the sack.

## CHAPTER VII.

### NEW YEAR'S DAY AT VILLA SALVIATI.

It is New Year's morning in Villa Salviati, the greatest holiday of the year. What Christmas-day has always been among us in England, the first day of the year has been, and is still, among the nations of continental Europe. Then friendly ties are reknit, and presents and remembrances of all sorts are flying about in every direction. Then, among Roman Catholic communities, it is not only the first day of the year, but the first day of Carnival also ; the period, more or less long, according to the fall of Easter, from the beginning of the year till the beginning of Lent, into which the social and religious habits and observances of Romish Christendom prescribe that all the junketing, the feasting, the dancing, the pomp-and-vanity worshipping, and dissipation of the year shall be concentrated. The theory of carnival keeping is, that Momus, leading forth his gay procession of votaries on the first day of his reign in joyous, yet moderate and orderly mirth and jollity, continually beats the measure of his mad dance quicker and quicker, as the pleasure weeks of the year slip on, until with a "sempre crescendo" movement, and grand finale crash, he brings them, in headlong career of frantic fun and universal licence, suddenly to a dead full stop on the sombre threshold of lententide, which neither he nor his crew may pass. Sharply the mad revellers are pulled up on their haunches. At mystic toll of bell in the small hours of that last night of revelry, sudden as the change in a phantasmagoria, the scene is shifted. The dancing mimes vanish ; the preaching friars come in. Feasting is changed to fasting.

Pomatum and powder give place to ashes and owls. The world has its fling. Now Heaven must have its turn. What has been done amiss according to rule and fashion, must now, according to rule and fashion, be wiped out by due penitential application, and all made straight. This is the orthodox theory and practice of carnival and lententide.

But Mother Church takes a part also in inaugurating the holiday season. The festival of the New Year commences with full-dress Church ceremonials, and ends with equally, but not more, full-dress balls. A great gathering at the palace, of magnificently-embroidered coats, grand powdered perukes, jewelled stars, and crosses, collars and buckles, with more or less noble homunculi within or beneath them ! Then all the duke's horses and all the duke's men, and the serenest of highnesses himself, and all the court ladies, and all the court gentlemen, proceed in great state to the cathedral, and are received there by the archbishops, and the canons, and the vicars, and the deacons and the precentors, and postcentors, and the acolytes, and the little boys in scarlet gowns swinging their fragrant censers, all in their best array. And everybody bows to everybody else, bows to the right and bows to the left, and the soldiers line the huge nave, and "salute the host" by banging their firelocks on the pavement; and thus the year is well begun by a general performance of religious duties.

But for the nobles of the court circle this state procession to church, and the previous assembling at the grand-ducal palace, is also a duty of etiquette towards the sovereign. It was "expected" that the grandees should pay their compliments personally on that day at the Pitti. And as the mass was at an early hour, and the reception at the palace consequently at one still more matutinal, and as Salviati had to go into the city from the villa, it behoved him to be afoot at a somewhat earlier hour than usual.

The servants at the villa, for their part, were all up and prepared for the great day, by times. Indeed, there was enough to be done. There was the great state carriage to

be got out and prepared, and there were the six great state horses to be caparisoned. And all this had to be done in duplicate—one great state carriage to convey his excellency the duke to the Pitti, and another great state carriage to carry her excellency the duchess. The same portentously clumsy “leathern conveniency” could not suffice for the pair—forbid it etiquette! A duke and duchess jog to court Darby-and-Joan-wise cheek-by-jowl! Faugh! And then all the spick-and-span new liveries, cumbrous with worsted lace, and silver lace, and gold lace, according so the rank of the wearer in the servants’-hall hierarchy, had to be fitted on. A special messenger, too, had to be despatched to the city early that morning. For my lord’s new gorgeously-embroidered state coat had not come home overnight—the last possible moment being then, as even to the present day, deemed the best in Tuscany for the transaction of all such business. And there would have been trouble in the household if my lord duke had risen on the New Year’s morn, and demanding, as it was felt he naturally would, his new embroidered coat with his first waking words, were prevented from forthwith contemplating it.

Fortunately the magnificent garment, the fruit of many a long winter night’s vigil, during which weary eyes and skilful fingers had laboured at their dainty work, arrived, just as the silver-embossed hand-bell—(sold, very likely, at the Hôtel Droûot to some banker’s favourite sultana the other day)—which stood by the duke’s bedside, announced to expectant valetdom the fact of his waking. But behold! the change in Jacopo Salviati, which had occasioned so much speculation at court, produces its strange results to the minutely observant eyes of his servants also. His excellency’s first thought on this New Year’s morning of 1639 has not reference to his own personal adornment!

“Luigi!”

“Eccellenza! A happy new year to your lordship, and may every succeeding one outdo the felicity of its predecessor.”

Luigi had got that up carefully overnight, under Francesca's tuition, in the servants' hall.

"Any pretty little compliment will do with my lord," said she. "You have an easy task with him, you gentlemen of the chamber. If the sun shines, and certain sunny eyes we wot of shine as brightly (and I don't think his lordship is likely to look into many sombre ones outside this weary villa), he is sure to be easily pleased. But, by all the saints, we women have a very different job with my lady."

"I declare," continued Luigi, "the sun is shining brighter, as is only natural, since your lordship has awaked."

"Very likely. The day grows older. I think I must recommend you at court, friend Luigi, for a lord in waiting; your talents in flattery are quite thrown away here. But, I want to know whether the casket that came home from the Ponte Vecchio\* last night was sent off this morning according to my orders?"

"Eccellenza, it was."

"Has the messenger returned?"

"Not yet, my lord."

"How long is it since he started on his errand?"

"Nearly three hours, your excellency. He set off long before sunrise."

"Three hours! and the lazy dog is not here to give an account of his mission! Who took the packet?"

"Tonino, my lord, on the roan mare. But his orders were, according to your excellency's directions, to give the packet into no hands save those of the Lady Caterina herself. And it may well be that he had to await her rising."

"Humph! Caterina is not wont to be a laggard in the morning," he muttered to himself rather than to the servant; "and the sun has been up an hour or more. Maybe those rake-hells, Carlini and Serselli, kept the revel up late last

\* The Ponte Vecchio is, and for centuries has been, the principal habitat in Florence of the jewellers and goldsmiths. The shops on the bridge are occupied by them almost exclusively.

night, and sweet Kate's pretty eyes are heavy this morning. When they did open, I flatter myself they brightened a little at the first New Year's gift they lit on. Pretty, sparkling eyes! How I can fancy them laughing back the sheen of the glittering stones as they flashed up at her from their black velvet bed. Ah! Messer Guido, choose as you may the most brilliant diamonds in all your stock, cut them and polish them as you will, they are no match for the eyes you have pitted them against. Your choicest pearls will but lose their colour against that skin. I think I see the pleased smile mantling over those full curved lips as she takes the baubles from their casket and tries the effect of them on that snowy neck and peerless brow. Luigi!"

"Eccellenza!"

"Run and see if Tonino has mayhap returned. I must have the answer from Casa Canacci before I go to court."

The New Year's gift which Salviati had sent to Caterina had been, indeed, a splendid one—a tiara and necklace, that might have paled with envy the cheek of a duchess. It had been intended to meet her eyes the first thing on the New Year's morning, and the giver was greedily impatient for his share of the pleasure in the receipt of her acknowledgments. A little word, moreover, was expected to accompany these acknowledgments, assenting to certain proposed arrangements for a meeting after Salviati should have discharged his duty to the grand-duke by appearing for as short time as he could make it at the state court-ball in the evening. The duke's unwillingness to start on the obligatory gala business of the day before getting the expected answer from Casa Canacci will, therefore, be readily appreciated.

"Eccellenza!" said Luigi, returning with the gorgeous new court coat in his hands, as if he hoped that the sight of it might divert his master's thoughts from the lagging Tonino's tardiness for a few minutes, "Tonino has not returned. Doubtless he will be here before your excellency can be dressed. Your excellency's new suit was sent home in good

time this morning. I think, though it does not become me to judge, that no cavalier at the Pitti, let him be Strozzi, ay, or the grand-duke himself, will match that, this morning." The experienced valet held the glittering garment artistically, so that the sun's rays glistened and shimmered on the profusion of gold embroidery, encasing pearls and diamonds in its network, as he spoke.

"Good!" said Salviati, glancing at it without much attention, not that he was generally careless of such matters. But Salviati's mind was busy with yet more interesting thoughts.

"Well," said he, "I must get me dressed the while. I shall be late at the Pitti else. Has my lady duchess sent in my linen?"

"Not yet, my lord. I have not yet warned my lady's women that your excellency was stirring."

It must be understood that amid all the gorgeousness of state and ostentatious magnificence characteristic of that period, no lady, however high in rank, if she cared duly to discharge the duties of her station as mistress of a household, would deem herself dispensed from giving her personal superintendence to the fine and costly tissues of linen and lace, which made so important and ornamental a part of the male costume of that day.

"Well, let la Francesca know that I shall be ready for the things presently. And, Luigi, tell Carlo to run to the brow of the hill and look out if he can see Tonino coming up the road. By the holy rood, if he has been letting the grass grow under his horse's hoofs, I will crop his ears for his pains."

\* \* \* \* \*

Meanwhile, the New Year's morning had opened on another scene in the apartments occupied by the duchess.

She had been up and dressed from the earliest dawn of day. Indeed, her women, cross enough despite the holiday face de rigueur appropriate to the festival, and their hopes of New Year's presents, at the strangely early call on their ser-

vices, declared to each other that their lady had not been in bed at all. Had she been spending the night in devotional exercises? May be! Who knows what maggot she will take into her troublesome head next? At all events, there is no sign of her prayers—if prayers they have been that have occupied her night—having brought her temper into a Christian frame. Truly, as Francesca had observed to Luigi, while the latter was waiting the summons to his master's chamber, truly her excellency's humours grew more cantankerous every day. There was no understanding her; and if things went on in this way much longer, she, Francesca Berti, should think of looking out for a service in some pleasanter and better-regulated household. And now she wished anybody could tell her what was the meaning of it! There was her lady not dressed for court at all. There she was, dressed all in black, as if it were All Souls' Day instead of the New Year's morning.

In truth, the bearing and appearance of the Lady Veronica were little "like the time." When, at daybreak, she had summoned her women they found her already partially dressed; and the bed, though in some degree disarranged, showed signs of not having been slept in. There was a something, too, in the eye and face of the duchess which, although her women would have been at a loss to describe it, impressed them disagreeably. There was an expression of ferocity in the eye, mixed with a kind of dreamy absence of manner, which was unlike her usual moody sombreness. Her first words, too, were strange and lugubrious.

"A happy New Year to your ladyship, and may the Holy Virgin and the saints give your excellency many such!" said Francesca, performing the recognized duty of the day, in the hope of receiving the usual largess.

"Oh, brava! Francesca," returned the duchess, with a kind of sneering bitterness. "Many years to return like this, and many a New Year's Day of similar colour and quality! What a charming wish! Girl, one such day as this is enough

for a lifetime ! There be pleasures, they say, which pall on repetition. Thy master sent a messenger to the city this morning. I would know if he has returned."

"He has, my lady ; and has brought with him the tailor, bearing his excellency's new court dress—assuredly the richest and sweetest fashion that ever graced a noble gentleman. 'Tis——"

"Hold thy fool's prating !" interrupted the duchess, fiercely. "Thy master sent a messenger this morning to Casa Canacci, in the Via dei Pilastri, and thou knowest well, girl, that it is of him I would speak. Has the messenger returned from Casa Canacci, I ask ?"

"I know not, your ladyship ! I will go and see," replied Francesca, glad of an excuse to leave the presence of her mistress.

"A premature return of that man would spoil all !" muttered the duchess to herself, as soon as she was left alone. "But he will not return yet," she continued, musingly ; "there will be confusion and much talking over the nine days' wonder. The gadding Tuscan will never resist the temptation of hearing everything that every wiseacre has to say on the matter, and adding his own contribution to the heap of lies no doubt already current. No, no ! he will not return yet awhile. It is no use, Jacopo, to be in such a hurry for your messenger's report—he will come time enough ! Anxious to know how his pretty present was received ! Faith, 'twas a nobly chosen gift ! My offering, Jacopo, shall be as rare, ay, and as costly a gift as thine to thy love—thy dainty-featured, bright-eyed love ! Sure all that loveliness is mirrored in thy fancy at this moment. So would I have it, Jacopo, my husband ! I would have thy warm imagination filled with picturings of that exquisitely-tinted cheek—how full of youth and health is the delicate peach-bloom ! Is it not, Jacopo ?—of that laughing eye ! is it not in every beam eloquent of passionate love, as it answers glance for glance to thine own ?—of the beautifully rounded spotless marble of that delicate



neck ! Does the circlet of pearls become it well, my husband ? ”

As she spoke, she extended both hands, as in imagination tendering some present for acceptance, her body bent a little forward in humble attitude the while, and the face a little up-raised. Ah ! that face ! surely a face to stamp its image on the brain of whoso looked on it, almost indelibly ! The fierce ominous scowl on the lowering brow, and the lurid light in the bloodshot eyes, made such terrible contrast with the writhed sneering smile on the cold thin bloodless lips !

The girl Francesca returned to the room as the duchess was still standing in the attitude described. She was on the point of giving her answer respecting the errand on which she had been sent, but remained in speechless astonishment at the sight before her, thinking that the moody humours of her mistress had at length culminated in unmistakable insanity. Presently, the duchess turned towards Francesca, and said, after a moment of reflection :

“ Ah ! the man ! the messenger to my lord’s . . . friends in Casa Canacci ? Has he returned ? ”

“ He has not, so please your excellency.”

“ Well, so far ! Is my lord yet stirring ? ”

“ He is, my lady. Luigi has just come from his chamber. And, so please your ladyship, he says my lord is asking for his linen.”

“ Well again ! My lord shall be punctually served. Collar and sleeves, ruffles and wristbands, Holland linen and Flanders lace are all ready. Go thou, Francesca, and bring hither the silver basket to lay them in.”

The silver basket or dish, or large basin rather, which the duchess sent for, was a beautifully-chiselled piece of plate, the work of a former century, much prized by several generations of the Salviati, and frequently used by the Lady Veronica for its present purpose.

“ Am I not punctual,” she muttered, as, once more left alone, she proceeded to take the fine linen and rich laces from

their repository—"am I not punctual in each point of a good wife's duty? Lie lightly, snowy folds, and keep the secret of my New Year's offering, till Jacopo Salviati's own hand shall unveil the gift Veronica Cybo sends him!"

"Put the basin there, Francesca," she continued to the girl, who entered bringing it; "and go thou and bid Luigi ask if it be my lord's pleasure that I send his things forth-with."

Francesca again left the room, more mystified than ever by the strangeness of her mistress's manner, and by the unnecessary message she was bidden to carry. Had she not already told the duchess that my lord was waiting to complete his toilette? She met Luigi returning from his second mission to ascertain if Tonino could be seen coming up the hill on his return from Casa Canacci.

"I wish," said he, "that rogue Tonino would make better speed when he is sent to the city. If he don't mind what he is about, he will get dog's allowance from my lord when he does come. I never saw his excellency in such an impatience!"

"Ay!" returned Francesca, "one can understand *his* impatience for an answer from his innamorata; but what can one make of my mistress? She seems as anxious about Tonino's return as he is!"

"Why upon earth did you tell her anything about his going? Ah! women's tongues!"

"I never told her anything! What do you take me for? Do you think I don't know my place better than that?"

"How, in the name of wonder, did she find it out, then?"

"The saints only know how she found it out! But, I'll tell you what, Signor Luigi, I do believe that my lady is not in her right mind. You mark my words. The duchess will go mad one of these blessed days, if she is not mad at this moment, as I believe she is. I don't believe she has been in bed all night. She has not dressed for court, and no signs of her going to do it. Then she is all in black this morning, of

all the days of the year ! And now she has sent me to ask if my lord is ready for his linen. I have told her once that he is waiting for it ! ”

“ Then go back to her ladyship, and tell her so again,” rejoined Luigi. “ Her excellency may go to Bonifazio,\* instead of going to court, if she thinks proper. But *we* must not be late at the Pitti this morning, Run along, Cecchina mia, there is a good girl, and let us have the things directly ! There is no Tonino to be seen. And I must get my master dressed and off to court without his answer from la bella Caterina.”

Francesca returned to her mistress, and on entering her chamber found the linen and the lace for the duke’s toilet all ready, and daintily laid out in the silver basin.

“ So please your ladyship, my lord is waiting for his things.”

“ And I am waiting to send them to him. See, Francesca, my child, all is ready prepared. Take the basin carefully, my girl. Bear it in both hands ; thou wilt find it heavy. There is, beneath the linen, a surprise for my lord, a New Year’s present from his loving wife. Bear the basin, deftly, girl. Nay, I will myself open the door for thee, and see thee safe to the door of my lord’s chamber.”

Francesca lifted the heavy basin—so heavy as to set her marvelling greatly what the present could be which her strange and incomprehensible mistress had taken this odd method of conveying to her husband. Not jewellery, certainly Simple cash ? Solid dollars might, indeed, make the weight which puzzled her. But it seemed hardly likely that the Lady Veronica could make a present of vulgar dollars to the duke. Perfumes ?—some huge flask of essence, or some precious casket of unguent, the produce of the lady’s chemistry and still-room industry ? Ay ! that seemed more likely.

“ God send,” thought Francesca to herself, as this explana-

\* The Florentine Bethlehem Hospital.

tion of the mystery occurred to her, "that my lady's chemistry be lawful, and her drugs wholesome. Were I Duke Jacopo, knowing all I know, I would none of any confection of hers."

So the basin, with the fair linen and the rich lace lying innocently and lightly on its surface, was borne in a sort of procession through the doors and passages between the lady's chamber and that occupied by the duke; the duchess holding wide the doors for her maid to pass, and escorting her on her way. Had she not adopted this precaution, it might have been safely predicted that Francesca's curiosity would have prompted her to examine her mysterious burden on the road, before bringing it to its destination.

Arrived at the door of the duke's chamber, the duchess tapped, and on being bidden by the voice of Luigi to enter, she so threw it open as to allow Francesca to pass without being seen herself. The door fell back into its place, leaving the duchess, pale as death, breathlessly listening on the outside of it.

"A prosperous and happy New Year, and many of them to your excellency," said Francesca, as she entered; "I have brought your lordship's linen, and my lady bids me say that she has sent your excellency a New Year's gift at the bottom of the basin. What it may be, my lord, I know not, seeing that my lady herself placed the things as your lordship sees them, but 'tis something heavy to carry."

"Thanks, my pretty Francesca, there's a fee for thy good wishes not so heavy to carry back," said Salviati, taking the pretty Abigail by the chin and giving her a kiss on the cheek. "But stay—something a little heavier must go with it this New Year's morning. There's for thy good wishes," putting a gold piece into her hand; "now run and give my thanks and compliments to the duchess, and tell her we shall meet presently at court."

And thus in lightsome mood the duke proceeded to complete his toilette.

First, on the top of the basin, lay lightly the large laced ruffles for his wristbands. These he lifted carefully, and started with a surprised and angry frown on seeing beneath them the voluminous and exquisitely fine muslin intended for his neck, stained with a large red spot on its snowy folds just in the centre of the basin.

“Ha! what’s this? some ill-timed jest!” he cried. “Luigi here, lift me this loathly cloth. What have we of the Lady Veronica’s sending beneath it?”

He spoke, his cheeks and lips growing pale with an unreasoned and undefined misgiving. Luigi, too, hesitated and turned pale as he put his hand to the blood-stained linen. After a moment’s pause, he lifted it from the basin with a sudden twitch.

\* \* \* \* \*

There, in the bottom of the basket, lay the head of Caterina Canacci. That lovely face, every smiling lineament of which had even at that moment been present to her lover’s picturing fancy, so awfully the same, so awfully not the same!

It is on record that from that dreadful hour Jacopo Salviati never smiled again—never more had any part in the pleasure or the business of the world around him—and died a broken-hearted, prematurely-aged wreck of man, while by count of years he should yet have been in the prime and flower of his life.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE MAJESTY OF THE LAW.

THE chronicle of the wrongs of Veronica, Duchess of Salviati, and of her memorable vengeance, has been completed, and there is little more to be told to complete this specimen of the Italian life of the seventeenth century. Yet, inasmuch as not even in Florence, under Ferdinand the Second, could such a series of facts pass wholly without external consequences, it is

worth while to add another feature to the social picture, by briefly telling what those consequences were. The Via dei Pilastrì, it will be remembered, was quite quiet in its total darkness, when the assassins escaped after the perpetration of the deed. Some alarm, indeed, seems to have been given, perhaps by the people of the house into which Serselli and Carlini escaped. But the police, as was then and there invariably the case, arrived when the malefactors were clear off from the scene of their crime. Shortly after their escape, "la Corte," as the chief police-officer and his men were strangely called, came with lights and bustling noise up the Via dei Pilastrì—always with abundance of light and noise—to give due premonitory notice of their approach.

Bartolommeo Canacci, it will be remembered, had been left in the fatal house paralyzed by terror and imbecility, and almost in a state of deliquium. As soon, however, as the assassins had departed, carrying away with them the most frightful of the evidences of their crime, and the house remained in dead stillness, with the exception of the helpless wailing, which from time to time came from the chamber of old Giustino, Bartolommeo's excess of terror had subsided. As soon as he ascertained that in truth he and his bedridden old father were the only living beings remaining in the house, thoughts of turning the occasion to his own advantage began to arise in his mind. And when the officers of justice entered, he was found rifling the coffers in the old man's chamber, heedless of his mingled entreaties and imprecations.

It was a matter of course, according to the traditions of the Florentine police, that both these, the evidently helpless father, as well as the presumptively guilty son, should be arrested. Nor did the zeal of the "Cargello" \* and his officers cease there in a matter the scandal of which was the talk of every tongue, gentle and simple, in Florence. Several other relatives of the unfortunate family, with their wives and families,

\* The chief of the Florentine police, as well as the prison over which he presided, was so called.

some of them resident in villas at a distance from Florence, were arrested and lodged in the Bargello. Of course nobody, official or unofficial, had the slightest idea that these unhappy people were in any way guilty of the horrible crime, but it was desirable that something should be done, and some activity manifested. And although the real authoress of the crime, and the motive of it, were well known, it was especially necessary that "Justice" should not presume to lay her hand on personages placed so far above her. It was necessary, also, or at least decent and desirable, that, although in fact the truth of the matter was no mystery, the city and the authorities should pretend to know something very different. One "procès-verbal" accordingly was drawn up containing a true account of the facts of the case as far as they could be known; and a second fictitious one, in which nothing was suffered to appear derogatory in any way to "persons of condition." The first document was sedulously locked away from the light of day among the secret archives of the court, in company with much else which it was fondly hoped would never be exposed to the public eye. The second was given to the world as the result of the most accurate investigation that justice could make into the history of so monstrous an enormity.

The depositions of the Signori Carlini and Serselli were also taken. They related what they had seen in the Casa Canacci, and afterwards from the window of the adjoining house. Of course their evidence criminated no one on whom the police could lay hands except the wretched Bartolommeo. It was proved that the assassins who had entered the house had obtained access to it by his means, and had come in in his company. In a short time—as it seems to have appeared to the Florentine public of that day; that is to say, in a few months—the unfortunate old man was allowed to return to his own bed to die, and the other manifestly innocent members of the family were liberated. But Bartolommeo, and a brother of his, who appears to have had nothing whatever to do in the matter from first to last, were tortured. And the agony of the rack soon forced





# THE LOTTERY DREAMER.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE MERENDA.

THE "Cascine," as all know well who have done their Italy, are the delight of the "upper ten" (*hundred*) at Florence. The word, which is the plural form of Cascina, literally a cheese meadow, may be rendered by our phrase, a dairy farm. And the lovely spot in question was, in fact, the Grand-Duke's dairy farm. There the richest milk and the best butter were to be had by all who were willing to pay a higher price than the ordinary market rate for those luxuries, and who were also content to go some mile or so beyond the city gate in search of them. The past tense, indeed, need only be used as regards the ownership. For I have not heard that our Tuscan revolution in any wise disturbed the cows at their pasture, or turned the milk sour in the well-appointed dairy. So our "upper ten" take their evening drives as usual; those who think with Rousseau, that no dainties are so delicious as dairy dainties, still find cream and butter forthcoming in return for the accustomed pauls, and the Cascine are still as beautiful as ever, though no longer grand-ducal.

Few cities possess so delightful a public pleasure-ground as our Florentine dairy farm. For driving, riding, walking,



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Few cities possess so delightful a public pleasure-ground as our Florentine dairy farm. For driving, riding, walking,

sitting, or lounging away a summer hour in the deep shadow of a forest glade, the Cascine are unrivalled.

Occupying a strip of ground immediately outside the city gates, about three miles or so in length, bounded on the south by the Arno, and on the north by the little stream of the Mugnone, which falls into the former river at the farther end of it, the inclosed space combines every variety of combination of meadow and woodland. A well-kept walk along the bank of the Arno, well fenced in from the winds sweeping down from the Apennines to the North by a magnificent high hedge of laurestinus, bay, and arbutus, and commanding the most picturesque peeps of the domes and towers of the city, framed in openings among the forest trees, offers as luxurious a winter's walk as can well be imagined. Soft sandy alleys cut in the forest, and appropriated especially to equestrians, present a ground for a gallop that "Nimrod" himself would have approved of. A good road around the whole space now skirting the greenest coppice-embowered meadows, now plunging amid thick shady woods, and now again commanding a view of that lower range of the Apennines which shuts in the happy valley called after the Arno, makes a rarely equalled drive. There is no describing, without the aid of brush and palette, and a right skilful hand to use them, the exceeding beauty of the view towards this mountain range, especially about the hour of an autumnal sunset. Passing over the strip of highly-cultivated and rich alluvial flat which forms the bottom of the Val d'Arno, the eye is charmed with the extraordinary multitude of villas, with their surrounding trees and gardens, which stud the lower slopes of the hills. These are the abounding evidences of the luxury and wealth of the anteducal days of Florence, which so struck Ariosto by their number as to lead him to say, that if Florence could gather them within her walls, she would be equal to two such cities as Rome. Above these rises the range of hills which, under the names of Monte Morello, Monte Acuto, and the Mugello Hills, forms the barrier of the Val d'Arno. At the hour I

have named they are all bathed in a rose-coloured bloom, gradually deepening into purple plum colour, as the short southern twilight dies away; and then whitening into pale ghosts of mountains, as the Moon rises over the slender tower of Fiesole on its saddled-backed hill to the right, and far away in the same direction, over the dark pine forests of Vallombrosa, the sombre darkness of which sullenly refuses to smile beneath the pale ray like every neighbour hill around.

But before the last of these phantasmagoric changes has taken place, the band that has been playing among the rhododendron clumps in front of the handsome range of buildings containing all the dairy accommodation and appurtenances, has finished the last favourite bit from Verdi's last opera, and the last lingering carriage of all the closely-packed crowd drawn up in the open gravelled area between the building and the band has moved off towards the city. 'Tis the mode with the cosmopolite Florentine "upper ten" to halt in the spot described, after their drive for half an hour or so, before returning to the city. Some like to listen to the music, many enjoy the cool evening air blowing down from the hills. Almost all love dearly the polyglot flirting at carriage-doors and windows, most conveniently and amicably performed when a dismounted cavalier is stationed on either side of a carriage containing two fair dames. All feel the absolute necessity of remaining in the spot, where fashion has decreed that it is at that hour essential to be found. So it often occurs that thinly-clad belles, who have been yielding to one or all of these temptations, may be seen gathering handkerchiefs and scarfs closely around delicate throats, while they are carried off through the darkening avenues at a sharp trot. For our Cascine, with all its unrivalled charms, has, truth to tell, the reputation of being not wholly salubrious during the first hour after sunset. A light fleecy mist may at such times be observed to settle down upon it, while Florence and the neighbouring hills are as free from damp as at mid-day. The bright emerald green of the meadows hints that all the ad-

vantages of different climates cannot be perfectly combined. And it unfortunately happens in this, as in some other cases, that the sanitary laws and those of "la mode," taking no cognizance whatever of each other's edicts, are apt to be a little at variance on the subject of evening drives to the Cascine.

But despite the habits of fashion, the social life of Florence is, perhaps, the least aristocratically exclusive of any to be found in the cities of Europe. There is even still deep down at the bottom of the national character a foundation of republican sentiment, surviving from the grand old days when Florence was said to be "the most republican of all republics," which very perceptibly modifies the manners and ways of the people. "Nobili" and "Snobili" are right classical Tuscan terms. Yet the division signified by them is a more impassable one on the banks of the Thames than on those of the Arno. Accordingly, we have no Hyde Park for the one class, and Victoria Park for the other. Our beautiful Cascine serves for all. And the working people of both races are quite as alive to its charm, quite as fond of enjoying it, quite as anxious to make themselves smart for the occasion of doing so, and often—taking into consideration the advantages imparted to a Manchester cotton print by a lithe figure, and the disadvantages inflicted by a dowdy one on a French muslin—quite as successful in achieving that end.

But, although holidays are by no means such rare things in Florence as they are in London, still every day is not a holiday. Some are only half-holidays. There are even a few which are not holidays at all. And the snobile population, for the most part, limits its Cascine gaieties to those which are. Nor for that reason, it is to be observed, do the non-working classes at all take it into their heads that pleasure-seeking becomes thereby "Vulgar" on a holiday. On the contrary, the same days which witness the greatest concourse of plebeians in all sorts of places of resort for the purpose of recreation, witness also an increase of the throng of patricians.

But there are certain days in the year when the true cockney Florentine especially makes a point of visiting the Cascine. It is in the prime of the early summer, in May, that the working world of Florence make their great Cascine holiday. A "merenda," or luncheon to be eaten in the southern meadow on the bank of the Arno, is the great enjoyment looked forward to, and the object, in many cases, of weeks of previous careful saving and scraping.

It is one of the very rare occasions on which eating and drinking enters into the plan of popular Florentine holiday-making. But very little out of the little that the working classes can spend, or ought beyond the bare necessities of life, goes on what we northerns especially designate as creature-comforts. The theatre, cigars, a drive in a hackney-coach, six inside, the lottery, and dress, have all prior claims to the stomach. In no community in Europe, probably, is so large a proportion of the income of the entire society spent in dress as in Florence. The northern visitor, whose eye has been attracted by a pretty face at the window of a humble tenement, with its magnificent raven tresses most artistically dressed, and a finely-shaped bust encased in a snow-white and well-fitting bodice, could never imagine that the reason why the fair one thus consented herself with exhibiting half her pretty person at the window instead of showing the whole of it among the holiday crowd in the streets, consisted in the dire impossibility of accomplishing a presentable toilette for more than one half of herself.

In a fish-tail ends the form so fair above,

says Horace, speaking of a mermaid; and the case in question is almost as distressing:

In a bedgown ends the form so fair above.

At all events, Laura Vanni, the daughter of old Laudadio Vanni, the jeweller and goldsmith on the Ponte Vecchio, was as good a girl as a good man could wish to make a wife of

and as good a daughter as her father could desire, and very much better than he deserved. And yet, had it entered the old man's head to propose to her that any portion of her habiliments should be contrived with a view to disfiguring rather than enhancing the advantages of face and figure with which nature had endowed her, it is probable that an absurdity so monstrous in her eyes would have made a rebel of her. That it should be enjoined on her by any of the higher duties or sanctions, that she should make herself appear less beautiful than she might do, would have been so new, so unheard-of, so utterly incomprehensible to her, that it would have been a hopeless task to introduce such an idea into her brain.

Heaven knows her little toilette was simple enough on the morning on which I wish to present her to the reader, as she walked with her father and a couple of other individuals, to their annual festival in the Cascine. She had a plain white dress of some far from costly material, with a simple broad hem at the bottom—a *skirt* I believe I should say, for I mean only to speak of that part of it which robed her from the waist downwards. It was simple and cheap; but it was made of modest amplitude, and was irreproachably washed, starched, and ironed. Her bust to the waist was dressed in a black silk jacket, open in front so as to show a bit of worked muslin of the form of an inverted pyramid, extending downward to within an inch of the sash at the waist. This bodice also was quite plain. But it set to perfection on the rich contours of her figure. Large heavy bands of dark brown wavy hair were skilfully arranged on either side of her face, and were surmounted by one of those coquettish dark brown hats which are assuredly the most becoming head-gear that fashion has yet invented for the young and pretty; though many of those who are both are silly enough to let themselves be cheated out of the use of it by the stupid declaration of those who are neither, that it is "vulgar," only because the simplicity and easy cost of it place it within the reach of many.



And now how can I give an idea of the face that was beneath the hat, and between the bands of hair? It was a face of the veritable Florentine type, with smaller features, more delicately chiselled, more expressive of intelligence, more mobile, than Roman female beauty. There was none of the massive dignity and harmonious repose of the Roman type of loveliness. A much larger portion of the charm of the Tuscan girl depended on the soul within, expressing its meanings through the large well-opened clear grey eyes, and in the constant play of the lines of the mouth. Altogether, there was less of purely animal perfection. The type of countenance was the product of a race that had passed through many generations of a higher civilization than modern Rome has achieved. The delicately-formed rounded little chin, with its dimple in the middle, was somewhat prominent. The mouth beautifully shaped, and capable of an infinity of varying expression. The lips might perhaps have been called too thin, and might have been held to indicate that form would be considered more important than colour. The nose small, thin, and straight, but the least in the world *retroussé*. The great grey eyes were exceptional in a model Florentine head, and seemed to indicate that a rill of northern blood had in some antecedent generation been mingled with that of Laura Vanni's Tuscan forefathers. The eyebrows above these remarkable eyes were straight and strongly marked, and the brow was slightly projecting. The forehead, of very fair height, was rounded rather than straight, and indicated an organization in which the perceptive faculties were more strongly developed than the purely intellectual ones.

Three male companions were escorting pretty Laura to the Cascine. Of these, two seniors walked together in front. One was old Laudadio Vanni, and the other his intimate friend and gossip, and Laura's godfather, the Cavaliere Niccolo Sestini, who, having as a clerk in some one of the innumerable public offices spent his life till sixty years of age in doing

and as good a daughter as her father could desire, and very much better than he deserved. And yet, had it entered the old man's head to propose to her that any portion of her habiliments should be contrived with a view to disfiguring rather than enhancing the advantages of face and figure with which nature had endowed her, it is probable that an absurdity so monstrous in her eyes would have made a rebel of her. That it should be enjoined on her by any of the higher duties or sanctions, that she should make herself appear less beautiful than she might do, would have been so new, so unheard-of, so utterly incomprehensible to her, that it would have been a hopeless task to introduce such an idea into her brain.

Heaven knows her little toilette was simple enough on the morning on which I wish to present her to the reader, as she walked with her father and a couple of other individuals, to their annual festival in the Cascine. She had a plain white dress of some far from costly material, with a simple broad hem at the bottom—a *skirt* I believe I should say, for I mean only to speak of that part of it which robed her from the waist downwards. It was simple and cheap; but it was made of modest amplitude, and was irreproachably washed, starched, and ironed. Her bust to the waist was dressed in a black silk jacket, open in front so as to show a bit of worked muslin of the form of an inverted pyramid, extending downward to within an inch of the sash at the waist. This bodice also was quite plain. But it set to perfection on the rich contours of her figure. Large heavy bands of dark brown wavy hair were skilfully arranged on either side of her face, and were surmounted by one of those coquettish dark brown hats which are assuredly the most becoming head-gear that fashion has yet invented for the young and pretty; though many of those who are both are silly enough to let themselves be cheated out of the use of it by the stupid declaration of those who are neither, that it is "vulgar," only because the simplicity and easy cost of it place it within the reach of many.

And now how can I give an idea of the face that was beneath the hat, and between the bands of hair? It was a face of the veritable Florentine type, with smaller features, more delicately chiselled, more expressive of intelligence, more mobile, than Roman female beauty. There was none of the massive dignity and harmonious repose of the Roman type of loveliness. A much larger portion of the charm of the Tuscan girl depended on the soul within, expressing its meanings through the large well-opened clear grey eyes, and in the constant play of the lines of the mouth. Altogether, there was less of purely animal perfection. The type of countenance was the product of a race that had passed through many generations of a higher civilization than modern Rome has achieved. The delicately-formed rounded little chin, with its dimple in the middle, was somewhat prominent. The mouth beautifully shaped, and capable of an infinity of varying expression. The lips might perhaps have been called too thin, and might have been held to indicate that form would be considered more important than colour. The nose small, thin, and straight, but the least in the world *retroussé*. The great grey eyes were exceptional in a model Florentine head, and seemed to indicate that a rill of northern blood had in some antecedent generation been mingled with that of Laura Vanni's Tuscan forefathers. The eyebrows above these remarkable eyes were straight and strongly marked, and the brow was slightly projecting. The forehead, of very fair height, was rounded rather than straight, and indicated an organization in which the perceptive faculties were more strongly developed than the purely intellectual ones.

Three male companions were escorting pretty Laura to the Cascine. Of these, two seniors walked together in front. One was old Laudadio Vanni, and the other his intimate friend and gossip, and Laura's godfather, the Cavaliere Niccolo Sestini, who, having as a clerk in some one of the innumerable public offices spent his life till sixty years of age in doing

as nearly as possible nothing, was now in the enjoyment of a pension of some eightpence a day, and of the felicity of having nothing *whatever* to do from morning till night. He had possessed this happiness for the last ten years, and still deemed his lot a most enviable one. He was a bachelor, and his friend Vanni a widower of many years' standing. In appearance the two old men were singularly contrasted. The cavaliere was a short, fat, roundabout little man, with a head shaped like the large end of an egg, and a skull as bald as an egg-shell; rosy fat cheeks, from which every vestige of whisker, beard, or moustache was scrupulously shaven; and a face utterly void of any expression save that of profound contentment and placidity.

The old jeweller, Laudadio Vanni, was a very much more remarkable-looking man. His unusually tall and strangely-slender figure was alone sufficient to attract attention; but the impression produced by it was exceedingly enhanced by an abundance of long straggling locks of silvery whiteness, which were blown about by the breeze as he walked, carrying his hat in his hand, and by an ample and flowing beard of the same hue. But the singular expression of his face was needed to complete the portrait, which the memory of those who saw him rarely failed to retain. It was long, narrow, and emaciated as his body. The forehead was higher and straighter than his daughter's but much narrower, and remarkably pinched about the temples. But the eye was what gave the whole face its peculiar and striking expression. It was the same large clear grey eye that Laura had, scarcely dimmed by old Laudadio's eight-and-seventy years, but with a strange wildness and eagerness of expression that seemed to impart something almost "uncanny" to the physiognomy. The head might have been taken as a model for that of some rapt Ossianic bard, had it not been that there was a certain meanness about the lines of the mouth and in the expression of the narrow retiring forehead that would have been inconsistent with the idea. The old man stooped a little, not at the

shoulders, but at the hips ; and the attitude thus given to his body, joined to the slight protrusion of the chin, caused by the habitual rectification of the stoop, gave an air of restless anxiety to the figure which was very striking.

The fourth member of the party was, like old Vanni, a goldsmith and jeweller ; but, though he had reached his five-and-thirtieth year, he was not yet master of a shop and business of his own. A better workman at his art than Carlo Bardi could not be found in Florence, and that is saying a great deal. Nor could there have been found a more thrifty man, which, as these are especially Florentine virtues, is saying much more. But Carlo had been unfortunate—had been obliged to support entirely a sickly sister, and pay the debts of a worthless brother. Both these had now been dead some years, however, and Carlo was once again beginning to hope that he should achieve the establishment of a shop and business, of his own, and fulfil the almost equally long-deferred hope of making Laura Vanni his wife. It was quite understood between them long ago that the hope was mutual ; and their talk, as arm in arm they followed the two old men along the path by the bank of the Arno, was accordingly more of material interests, and less of the pleasant nonsense of love-making, than might have been the case some eight or ten years before. For Laura, I am shocked to say, had reached her seven-and-twentieth year.

When they reached the favourite meadow selected by the Florentines for the annual celebration of their “merenda” festival, the ground was almost entirely occupied by parties of four or five, or sometimes ten or twelve, covering with their clean white cloths, pitched in most unexclusive neighbourhood to each other, nearly the whole turf. The porter hired for the occasion, who had been sent on with the materials of our friends’ “merenda,” had selected for them what he deemed a desirable spot. But the old cavaliere was not so easily contented. One place was exposed to the wind from the hills, another would be in the full sun in half an hour ; a third did

not command a view of the "palazzo vecchio" tower; and he had eaten his "merenda" in sight of that every Ascension-day for the last ten years. His old friend the while took no part in his search for a spot to suit him, but seemed, with his strange eager look, intently occupied in counting the numbers of the different parties on the ground around—counting the men, counting the women (for almost every knot was composed of family parties)—counting everything he could see, and all with an appearance of the strangest interest.

At last, Old Niccolo—"Il Cavaliere," as his friend Vanni never failed to call him—found a spot to his liking; and the little party seated themselves on the grass, and made the necessary preparations for their feast. It cannot be said that the cavaliere's choice of a locality was a bad one. It was close under the thick tall hedge that forms the boundary of the meadow farthest from the city. The river was thus on their left; the meadows crowded with the holiday-makers, and the more or less pretentious and luxurious preparations for eating and drinking, with the towers and domes of the city in the distance, in front of them; and the thick woods of the Cascine, and above and beyond these the hill of Fiesole, with its tower and its villas to the right.

Laura drew forth from their store a clean white cloth, and four very coarse, but nicely-washed, napkins; while the cavaliere was ascertaining that the flasks of wine had travelled safely in the basket made expressly for the purpose of carrying a couple of Florentine flasks, and consisting of two circular receptacles some nine inches in diameter, and as much in depth, joined together at one point of their circumference, and surmounted by a semicircular handle. Such a contrivance is needed for moving the fragile egg-shell-like flasks, which enter so largely into Tuscan domestic use. Flasks for wine, flasks for oil, flasks for milk, flasks for medicine, flasks for water. The legal Florence flask contains seven pounds' weight of wine, and is equal to nearly three ordinary bottles. But the glass is of the very thinnest; and even the baskets

described above would fail in securing their large bulging sides and long slender necks from frequent breakage, were they not invariably covered with a rush-work coat as high as the shoulder. The neck, which ends without any rim, and looks just as if it had been irregularly broken off, is so slender, that corking it in our fashion is out of the question. The Florentine, therefore, when he has filled his wine-flask, pours into the narrow neck a little drop of olive oil, which, resting on the wine to the thickness of about half an inch, effectually and hermetically closes the aperture. A wisp of straw, or, oftener still, a vine-leaf, loosely placed in the mouth of the opening, serves to keep out flies, dust, and such matters; and the flasks, which of course remain always upright on their rush-plaited bottoms, may stay thus for years. When wanted, a morsel of wool or cotton thrust into the neck of the flask readily absorbs the oil, which is thus removed; or, without any such contrivance, a practised Florentine hand will toss the oil out with a jerk, without spilling a drop of the wine.

"There!" said the cavaliere, "those ought to be a couple of flasks of as good Pomino as you would wish to drink. I went to the bishop's cellar for them myself yesterday."

"Red wine—that gives me the number 33. I wanted my third number!" muttered old Vanni; "a very remarkable combination."

"Does all the Pomino vineyard belong to the Bishop of Fiesole?" asked Carlo.

"All," replied Signor Sestini; "but the worst of it is, that the bishop has other farms besides, on which he makes a very inferior wine; and his lordship is just as apt to mix his flasks, and cheat his customers, as any wineshop-keeper in Florence."

"Bishop is number 32!" cried Vanni; "very curious indeed."

Laura had by this time spread the cloth, and produced a long loaf of brownish bread, two feet or near it in length, by four inches in width, and three in height; a quantity of

"Salame," or Bologna sausage, uncooked, thinly sliced, and wrapped in abundance of fresh vine-leaves; some salad; a quarter of roast lamb—the grand dish of the repast—about as large as a good-sized quarter of rabbit; and some apples.

The fat little cavaliere and ex-clerk fell to at once; and the young people followed his example. But old Laudadio's head was still running meditatively on his numbers.

"The three objects of discourse that first spontaneously strike your mind, and take your attention," said he, more to himself than to his companions; "certainly they were the red wine, the bishop, and the apples. Why did my mind fix on those in preference to all the other things spoken of? Aha! there is the force of the cabala. I multiply the number of the first object by that of the second, and thus get 1050. I multiply this again by the number of the third, and this gives me 2100."

"But what is the connexion," said Carlo, with something almost like a groan, "between red wine and the number 33, or between a bishop and number 32?"

"What is the connexion!" returned the old man, sharply; "does not every one know that there is a profound and mystical relation between certain numbers and every object in nature and art, and every act which a man can do? Are they not recorded in the book which contains the result of the life-long labours of the greatest sages of the generations past?" And putting his hand in the pocket of the threadbare old long frock-coat, which hung loosely on his attenuated figure as on a clothes-horse, he pulled forth a dirty, greasy, and well-thumbed volume, entitled 'Fortune for all Men. A Book of Dreams for Players in the Lottery. The last improved edition, published at Florence, in 1858.' "Here," said he, laying his tremulous hand reverently on the book, "here is the connexion, friend Carlo"; and proceeding hurriedly to refer to his oracle, he turned to a kind of dictionary of all sorts of objects, names, and actions, which occupied one hundred and eighty-six out of its two hundred and fifty-



six pages, and pointed to the above-mentioned numbers appended to the objects in question. "Ah! the science of numbers is a great and wonderful science!" said he.

"But to think of your knowing the numbers denoted by the red wine, the bishop, and the apples, without turning to the book!" said the old cavaliere, with evident admiration. "Ah, my friend, what a head! what a mind you have!"

"Why papa knows every number in the list, I do believe," said Laura, laying her hand on the old man's silver locks, as he sat beside her, and kissing him on the forehead; "few know as much of the cabala as papa does."

"Few have studied them, perhaps, as profoundly and as long," returned he, with the mock humility of gratified vanity. "But, alas! Art is long, and the longest life short."

"The longest life would indeed be too short, I fear, to reach the goal of your studies, Signor Vanni," said Carlo, not without bitterness.

"Who knows!" cried the old man, fiercely. "Who knows when the reward may come to the watchful and unwearied student—come in a moment, suddenly, unexpectedly, rich and abundant! 2100, I said. Multiply this by the number of the current year, add the golden number, and with the product form the pyramid of the great Rutilio of Calabria. Take the second line of it for your first number, the two figures at the right hand of the base for your second, and the two figures at the left hand for your third number; place these beneath your pillow at night; and, should you dream of them, the result is sure;—almost sure," added the old dreamer, with a long-drawn sigh.

The cavaliere, meanwhile, was doing great execution among the eatables; and it was not till the last diminutive bone of the cat-like lamb was picked, that he lit his cigar, and soon afterwards fell asleep in perfect beatitude smoking it. The old jeweller ate very sparingly, and fell to conning his book, and doing endless multiplications and additions. The lovers, of course, were happy, and busy in talk of their hopes of

shortly accomplishing the long-awaited-for marriage. And thus the merenda lasted far into the afternoon ; and it was nearly sunset when the little party started to walk by the river-bank to Florence.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE JEWELLER AND THE JEWELLER'S DAUGHTER.

ON Tuscany, and on the dynasty of Lorraine, must rest the disgrace of having first given to Europe the evil example of a government exciting and pandering to the most pernicious antisocial vices of its people, by making gambling a national vice. The lottery, as a means of revenue, was first introduced there in 1740, shortly after the death of the last Medicean duke. Something of the kind had previously existed in the republic of Genoa. It was said to have arisen there from a system of betting on the different candidates for the various magistracies to be elected by ballot ; and it was in its early days known as the "Genoa Lottery." But it was at Florence that the lottery became a systematized means of duping and plundering the people. From Florence it passed to Vienna. France eagerly seized on the new invention. England, as we know, permitted state needs to override the perfectly understood, but deliberately disregarded, principles of state morality. To Frederick the Great belongs the honour of having resisted the temptation, and strictly forbidden the introduction of the abomination into his states. In proportion as the different countries have advanced in moral civilization, they have discountenanced and abolished their lotteries. In Italy, as might be expected, the system still continues in full vigour. Rome, struck at first sight by the immorality of the thing—but not at first sight comprehending the profit to be drawn from it—began by anathematizing the lottery, but pocketed its infallibility and adopted it, immediately on perceiving its real object and value.

In Central Italy, the Grand-Duke of Tuscany and the Father of the Faithful were partners in keeping the public hell for their respective subjects. And by this arrangement the lottery drawing in the various Tuscan cities served the Pope for continually "making the game" with his "children"; while that at Rome assisted the grand-duke in like manner. It is understood that the immoral and disreputable keepers of the gambling-tables at Baden-Baden and Homburg have chances in the games played to the extent of five per cent. against the players, who are perfectly well aware of the fact. But the amount of "the pull" which his Highness the Duke and his Holiness the Pope permitted themselves against their subjects, was, as near as may be, seventeen per cent.

The "game is made, gentlemen," in this wise: The drawing takes place every week in one or other of the different cities, more or less frequently in each in proportion to their size and importance, according to a regular fixed cycle. This change in the locality of the drawing has no other object or effect than to give each place in turn a share of the amusement of seeing the ceremony. The offices are always open in all the towns, and a man at Rome may play on the drawing to take place at Florence, or vice versâ, just as well as if the drawing were to be performed in his own city. The numbers put into the wheel are always from one to ninety inclusively. From these, five are drawn. The player, therefore, bets that such or such a number will be drawn.

When the drawing is to take place, a scaffolding, handsomely ornamented with upholstery, is raised in one of the most conspicuous spots in the city, and a band of music is provided. Three magistrates attend in their robes of office; the wheel is placed before them at the front of the platform, and a boy stands beside it. The numbers are called aloud by one of the magistrates, held up to the sight of the people, then passed from one of them to the other two successively, and lastly to the boy, who drops them, one by one, into the

wheel. Two or three turns of the machine mixes them well up together; and the boy proceeds to take out one. It is handed to the presiding magistrate, who calls it aloud, shows it to the crowd, and then affixes it in large figures to a board provided for the purpose. Then comes a flourish of music; and so on, till the five numbers have been drawn. They are immediately put up conspicuously in all the lottery offices; they are communicated as quickly as possible to the other cities; and the fortunate holders of them, if there be any such—for it will be observed that by this system it by no means follows that there will be any prizes to pay at all—present their tickets for payment at any of the offices.

It is difficult to give an adequate idea of the degree to which the lottery occupies the thoughts of the Tuscan populace, or of the largeness of the place it holds in their daily life. It has even modified their language. Expressions, allusions, metaphors drawn from it, have become part of their household speech. The walls and pavements throughout the city are always scrawled over with numbers, generally in combination of three or five. It is a constant subject of conversation; and if a working man has occasion to put his hand into his miscellaneously-filled pocket, the chances are, that you may see him pull out, among other matters, one of the abominable little strips of coarse grey-blue paper which constitute the tickets in the lottery. Hawkers, crying their special numbers, may constantly be heard in the street. A ticket may be bought for a sum somewhat less than a penny; and the mendicant risks his alms in preference to buying himself a bit of bread. Many and many of the poorest classes play every week; and there is always an especial run on the government pawnbroking establishment a few hours previous to the closing of the sale of tickets.

Hell's darksome gate stands night and day agape,

says the Latin poet.

A confirmed lottery-player is to a Tuscan family almost as

fatal a cause of misery and ruin as a confirmed gin-drinker is to an English hearth. And the reader will be prepared to find that the home to which we left Laudadio Vanni and his daughter Laura returning, after their day's holiday at the Cascine, was not a prosperous one. Yet, had it not been for the curse that was on the old man, there were reasons why it ought to have been. Laudadio Vanni had once been celebrated in the little world of Florence for his talent in his art. Ideas which have once become a portion of the popular mind in any country are endowed with a wonderful vitality. The goldsmith's art in the palmy days of Florence—from the old time when Giotto drew the perfect circle without compass as he sat at his work-bench, to the later generation when Cellini delighted Europe with the elegance of his fancy and the daintiness of his handiwork—was one of the fine arts. The statue of that unrivalled art-workman stands among the great ones—poets, painters, sculptors, statesmen, and captains—whom Florence still delights to honour; and his works are among the undying possessions which still bring the lovers and students of art as pilgrims to its shrine in Florence, from every part of the civilized world. And to the Florentine mind the cunning and tasteful worker in gold and its combinations is still an artist.

And Laudadio Vanni was held to have caught more of the ancient spirit and traditions of Florentine art than any of his contemporaries. If a restoration was needed of some treasured relic of former magnificence, no eye was so sure as Vanni's to comprehend the feeling of the original design, and no hand so capable of equalling the original workmanship. If a stranger needed a fitting setting for some gem of mediæval art, the acquisition of which was the main triumph of his tour, Vanni was the man to whom he was recommended. His was the shop on the Ponte Vecchio which travellers in search of some memorial of their stay at Florence especially sought out. And all this ought to have "led on to fortune." More especially as the old widower's only daughter from an

early age began to prove herself a very valuable assistant to him.

Laura Vanni was indeed a born artist. Had the circumstances of her position put it within her reach, she would have undoubtedly excelled in some one of the higher branches of art creation. She had striven hard, and had effected much, towards retarding her father's down-hill path on the road to ruin. Her talent had made itself known; her designs were sought; and the old shop on the Ponte Vecchio had a new attraction added to it. But the evil spirit she had to fight against was too strong for her; and gradually things went from bad to worse. A precarious hand-to-mouth struggle with difficulties drove them to substitute mere manufacture for the slower process of artistic elaboration. Visitors who sought the shop in the expectation of finding some charming chef-d'œuvre of grace and fancy, found only the ordinary bunches of turquoises and garnets and pearls, which made the staple of every shop on the bridge. The display even of these soon began to be scantier and shabbier than those of their neighbours and rivals. It was not only that the old man neglected his business, and did nothing, being wholly absorbed in cabalistic calculations, and endless searches for fortunate numbers from every object in life and in nature. Had this been the worst, Laura, by her own industry and talent, and with the true-hearted help of her faithful friend and patient lover, Carlo Bardi, might have managed to keep the old man and herself without any assistance from him. Carlo would willingly have installed himself as the old jeweller's assistant and workman, and have served his seven or twice seven years for his love, had such a scheme promised any good issue. It had often been talked over between them, and as often abandoned as hopeless. For old Laudadio was in the habit of pilfering from his own shop to supply the means of gratifying his passion. Any chance suggestion of a combination of numbers to his diseased brain was sure to be followed by the abstraction of a brooch or a bracelet; and a

dream was a sentence of sacrifice under cost price of the most valuable article in the shop.

It will be seen that poor Laura's task was an up-hill one, and her position sufficiently hard. Without the frequent and always ungrudgingly bestowed assistance of her godfather the cavaliere ex-clerk, old Sestini, it would have been impossible for her to have got on from one year's end to another. But it was curious enough, that though old Niccolo was held by all who knew him to be a fool, though he seemed, in truth, not to have two ideas on any subject under the sun, and, still more strangely, though he always testified the utmost admiration for his friend Laudadio's profound cabalistic science, yet some species of instinct with regard to the side on which his own bread was buttered, prevented him from ever risking a farthing in the lottery himself, and also led him so to manage his benefactions to Laura, as that they should always reach her hands just when needed to meet some special pressure, and should never find their way into those of his profoundly mathematical friend.

Under these circumstances, it would seem that pretty Laura Vanni must have been among the many victims who have cause to hate the paternal institution of the lottery as the one cause of all their sorrow in life. How numerous must be the victims ruined by the fatal passion in those on whom they depend! Yet no such feeling is common among the people, even among those who are themselves free from the lust of gambling. And Laura herself had no such feeling on the subject. It was not only that her affection for her father was in no wise diminished by his conduct, but she did not seem to feel either hatred or anger against the thing itself.

While the old shop on the bridge was becoming stripped, and things were getting worse and worse with Laura and her poor old incorrigible father, worthy Carlo Bardi was slowly making his way up fortune's hill. By rigid economy and hard work as a journeyman jeweller, he had contrived to save a sum which at last placed him in a position to make

a proposal he had been long meditating. This was nothing less than that Laudadio should give up the shop and business to him, that he and Laura should forthwith be married, and that he should charge himself with finding the old man a home and maintenance during the remainder of his days. The business had, in fact, become worth nothing, and the shop was as nearly as possibly bare. Nevertheless, Carlo hoped to be able to stock it with his little capital, and by his own industry and skill, and his wife's talent and taste, to recover in some degree its old credit. It was a bold scheme, for poor Carlo's means were of the smallest. When matters were canvassed between him and Laura, he steadily set his face against all notions of partnership with the old jeweller. Laura feared that her father's pride would rebel against this proposal of complete abdication. But Carlo was of opinion that the lottery had swept all that away, together with so much else.

At all events, it was settled between them, as they walked back from the Cascine on the Ascension-day evening, that the attempt should be made. Carlo went over his calculations yet once again, and, as usual, a certain sum of a hundred dollars figured in the little budget, which Laura was to receive on her marriage from her godfather. These hundred dollars had been laid aside years and years ago by the little cavaliere, long before he had quitted his place in the government office, and had they been placed at interest, might have been two hundred by this time. But nothing, to Carlo's great disgust, could ever induce Niccolo Sestini to take any step of the kind. There were the identical dollars, all fresh from the mint, and those dollars he should put into Laura's hand when she was to be married. Over and over again had he resisted temptation to permit the little hoard to be diminished. And he was equally immovable in refusing to touch it for the purpose of increasing it. "How could he know," he observed, when it was shown him that the hundred might ere this have become two hundred — "how could he know that Laura would have remained single so long?" So the hundred dollars were but



a hundred; but they were sure. And they were counted on by the young couple as a very important fund for meeting the immediate expenses of starting, and thus leaving Carlo's little capital free for the all-important work of stocking the old shop.

It may be surmised that Laura and Carlo saw little of the surpassing beauty of their sunset walk by the bank of the Arno from the Cascine to the city gate, and thence by the long line of the Lungarno to the Ponte Vecchio. It was then arranged between them that Carlo should call on her father on the following morning, and make his proposal. Old Laudadio, who, as in the morning, walked in front with the cavaliere, was equally blind to all around him, unless it were that he occasionally recorded to himself the numbers suggested, according to his science, by the objects that met his eyes. A little boy patiently dangling a bit of string at the end of a stick in the river, produced the remark that fishing with a hook was 41. Two men, with bare brown legs and arms, in a boat, which they were loading with sand scooped up from the shallows of the river, and which looked as if one more shovelful added to the heap which had already brought their gunwale to the level of the water, must surely sink their boat, led to the observation that sand denoted No. 20.

Old Niccolo alone seemed, as he gently puffed his cigar, strolling onwards with his hands behind his back, to be enjoying the lovely view of his dear Florence to the utmost. For among these Southern organizations, be it observed, it does not follow that because a man is seventy years of age, an ex-clerk in a public office, fat and paunchy, and an old fool into the bargain, he is therefore insensible to beauty of any kind. A Parisian, in a similar position and circumstances, would see no beauty save of a far more factitious kind. It is not so with a Tuscan.

"Ah! come è bella! come è bella!" he exclaimed, as the moon rose over the black pine-forests of Vallombrosa, and tipped the pinnacles of the Palazzo Vecchio's tall slender tower with her light.

"Moon," said Laudadio, "is number 6."

"She must be full to-night, I think," remarked Sestini.

"But *full* moon is 90, my sympathetic number!" cried old Vanni.

"What a head he has! What a philosopher's head!" said the ex-clerk, shaking his own in admiring wonder.

And so they passed under the shadow of the quaint old buildings on the Ponte Vecchio.

The Ponte Vecchio, or old bridge at Florence, is one of the most remarkable specimens remaining in Europe of the mediæval fashion of turning bridges into streets, by loading them with rows of houses on either side. Space within a walled and fortified inclosure was of course scarce and valuable; and the growing difficulty of lodging an increasing community within the unelastic circuit of its stone girdle, led citizens to this and other non-sanitary expedients, which, according to Dame Nature's usual just and inexorable mode of dealing with us, levied inevitable retribution on mankind for the crime of so mismanaging their lives on this fair earth as to make stone walls round their dwellings necessary to them. In a simply artistic point of view, something may be found to be said on either side—in favour of the old building-laden bridge, as well of the modern unembarrassed structure. If Waterloo Bridge be a beautiful and magnificent work of art, ancient London Bridge, as its appearance has been preserved for us by old pictures and engravings, was rich in picturesque beauty of its kind. And on the banks of the Arno, although the Ponte Santa Trinità, situated a few hundred yards lower down the stream, is a masterpiece of elegance, lightness, and scientific construction, it is its ancient neighbour, with its quaint superstructure of queer little shops, that attracts the eyes and occupies the sketch-books of both resident and pilgrim artists.

The Florentine working jewellers, who produce the combination of pearls, garnets, and turquoises, which are peculiar to Florence, and who invent cunning Etruscan settings for

pietra dura and cameo ornaments, still stick to the Ponte Vecchio. Their shops are of very diminutive dimensions. Behind most of them a tiny little back-shop is contrived, generally for the purpose of a workshop, by dint of projecting the buildings over the sides of the bridge, and supporting them by timbers, resting in a sloping position on its solid masonry. Notwithstanding what would seem a somewhat insecure foundation, these buildings are of two, and in some cases of three stories. They are built with complete contempt for all uniformity and regularity; and being adorned, here with an ancient stone-cut coat of arms or an inscription, there with a fragment of fresco or a tabernacle to the Virgin, with its pendent lamp in front of it, the general effect is picturesque in no ordinary degree.

Laudadio Vanni and his three companions turned up the bridge from the Langarno, and stopped before the narrow door of one of the little houses on the left hand as you cross from the north to the south side of the river. Massive iron-bound shutters, not made to stand perpendicularly against the front of the house, but projecting from it in a slope, so as to cover and protect the cases of jewellery made to jut out from the little window fronts, in order to gain a little space at the cost of stealing it from the public way, were in front of every tenement on the bridge, and now that they were all closed on this high day and holiday, had the appearance of huge sloping-roofed chests deposited on the pavement in front of each little house. Every narrow door, barely large enough for one person to pass through it at a time, was secured by two or more huge locks. The Florentine locksmith still looks mainly to massiveness and size as the elements of security, and dreams not as yet of the cunning devices by which an ounce of steel in the hands of a Bramah or a Chubb is made to render better service than half a dozen pounds' weight of less-skilled workmanship.

The old jeweller deliberately drew from his pocket a sufficiently greasy-looking leathern bag, or key case, which with

its contents may have weighed some six or eight pounds. Unwinding the thong which was bound around it, he took out first one huge key, which he applied to a lock at the middle height of the door, and gave it three complete turns. Then another such lock was opened at the top of the door. And lastly, an immense padlock, which secured an iron stanchion across the whole width of it, at the bottom, was removed ; and then at length the narrow door thus jealously secured was opened. There was little enough at present in old Laudadio's shop to necessitate all these precautions, but such had not always been the case.

Laura struck a light as soon as all four had entered the miniature dwelling, and proceeded, while her father carefully put up his keys again, to light two of those slender tall brass lamps, with their implements—snuffers, scissors for cutting the wick, and pin for trimming it, hanging around it by three brass chains—and their oil reservoirs and burners, made still in the shape of those found in old Etruscan tombs—lamps which are seen in every Tuscan house, and have in the eyes of strangers such a curiously classical appearance.

Placing one of these on the narrow little work-bench before the window on one side of the door, which was her father's now rarely occupied place of work, and in front of which stood his old worn arm-chair, she passed with the other through a door still narrower than that which communicated with the street, into the second room, if a space of some six feet square could be called such. Here, in front of a tiny window overhanging the river, was Laura's own little work establishment, with its appurtenances of multitudinous small tools, spirit-lamp, blow-pipe, &c. Three or four casts of bronzes and bassorilievi were hung round the little cabin. One or two old books, in a sadly dilapidated condition, containing engravings of celebrated gems and cut stones, lay upon a hanging table (or shelf rather, it was so narrow) against one of the side-walls. The little bit of a window, small though it was, gave the inmate the precious advantage of a pure and unbroken light ;

for, looking out over the river as it did, there was nothing between it and the heavens.

Here, seated at her bench and busily at work in shaping the delicate materials of her art into the expression of some dainty device or skilful reproduction of mediæval workmanship, Laura passed the happiest hours of her life ; unless, indeed, those exceptional ones of the society of Carlo are to be counted as ranking first in her estimation.

And now this evening, one of the last, as she hoped, silly mortal ! of that short, never-returning blossom-time of a life which precedes love's fruit season—this evening she would celebrate by a combination of both delights. The two old men sat down in the front shop for a "*chiaccherata*"—a bout of gossip ; and Carlo, as she had intended him to do, followed her into her workshop and artistic sanctum. She sat down in her accustomed seat at the narrow work-bench before the window, and Carlo took the only other seat in the little room, and placed himself at the end of the bench, and thus at right angles to her and the window. Of course they had enough to talk of. But if Laura had been intent on talk only, the lamp would hardly have been necessary ; for the moonlight was streaming in at the little window, and was reflected in a long pathway of light on the water, extending from the edge of the shadow cast by the "*Ponte alle Grazie*"—the bridge next above the *Ponte Vecchio* on the river—till it ended beneath the arches of the old bridge under their feet. Few quainter and more characteristic town views could be found than that commanded by the little window at which the lovers sat. In front, the queer old bridge of the *Grazie*, with its chapels, and little shops on its massive piers all in deep shadow, and the *Chianti* hills in the distance ; to the left the river façade of the *Uffizi*, with its noble arches and harmonious *Palladian* architecture—that frontage of which *Vasari* was prouder than of all his other various art-works, and of the difficulty of rearing which on the unstable soil of the river-brink he boasts so much—all this, too, black in deep shade ;

then, to the right, the strangely varied line of the backs of the houses, which at this part of the river come sheer down to the water, without any intervening quay or pathway. These were in the full moonlight ; but the irregularities of the buildings chequered the light with innumerable variously-shaped patches of shade. The backs of houses always offer a more suggestive and amusing view, and often a more picturesque one, than their more uniform street fronts, got up with a view to respectable appearance in public. The inhabitants of every one of them would be far more interesting objects of observation than they mostly are, if one could get a peep at their minds and opinions in an analogous behind-the-scenes point of view. And it is the same with their dwellings.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE JEWELLER'S SHOP.

LAURA's lamp was not needed for looking on this scene, or for conversing with Carlo, as they sat in the moonlight. But she was never absent from her work-bench for a few hours without longing to be back at it. And now she was in a hurry to look at a piece of workmanship which she was completing, and which she was anxious to compare with an engraving she had recollected while at the Cascine. Laura's piece consisted in a most ingenious and tasteful combination and adaptation of several pearls of large size, but of very irregular shape, in such a manner as to make their abnormal forms serve, instead of marring, the purpose of her design. Most daintily fancied was the idea she had imagined, and Laura was pleased with her work, and eager to return to it. Carlo had not yet seen it, as she had intended to have shown it to him only when finished. But this evening she could not resist drawing it forth from the little locked draw beneath the working-bench ; and so it was presented for the criticism of the Paris-taught workman in its still unfinished state.

"Charming!" cried Carlo, genuinely pleased with the beauty of the gem; "davvero, davvero—truly, truly, it is exquisite. There is but my Laura in all Florence this day capable of a design so deliciously fancied. There is the true sentiment of the cinque-cento," added he, recurring to a Florentine artist's constant beau-ideal of art in all its branches.

"Ah, that is the real praise!" said Laura; "that is what I have been striving after. And if I could only hope that I had a ray of the real light!"

Very absurd, was it not, for a poor jeweller's prentice daughter to talk in such a strain? Absurd enough for a girl to meddle with men's work at all, and quite against all the rules of the trade! But then, you see, poor Laura was an enthusiast in her own way; knew all the glories of the Carrionis, Gaffuris, Torricellis, and Ginghamis, the masters of her own craft in the days when fine art meant the creation of the beautiful in any form and in any material; knew especially the story of Francesco Borghigiani and his daughter, who at a later day won herself a niche in Art's Pantheon by her skill in works of the same class. And what with old Laudadio's ancient Ponte Vecchio traditions, her own art readings, her Florentine old-world notions, and her enthusiastic perception and culture of the beautiful, the pretty jewelleress had not the least idea that the professors of her craft had been pushed in the world's onward movement from the place of artists into that of artisans.

"What!" she would have cried, "was not old Niccolo Caparra, the blacksmith, immortalized by Vasari in the same pages that record Perugino and Raphael on account of his beautiful forgings? For me the artist is he who can feel and reproduce beauty!"

Quite a fanatica, this pretty little Laura! Yes; but not by very far so strange a one, observe, under the shade of Brunelleschi's dome, as she would have been under that of Christopher Wren.

Carlo Bardi had acquired more modern notions, and, moreover, was not an enthusiast in any way, though Laura's enthusiasm appeared infinitely beautiful to him.

"I *do* think, then, in all truth," replied he to Laura's outburst, "that your work has quite the style of the old workman. But I very much fear, my Laura, that the world's tastes have so much changed, that, with the exception of here and there a purchaser with antiquarian tastes, this beautiful work of yours would not be calculated to meet the modern demand. Look, now, at this model of a brooch," added he, taking a small case from his pocket, "that we have just received from Paris at our place, as a sample of the last new style."

"A sample!" cried Laura, flushing with indignation; "and of the latest Paris style. Do tell me, Carlo mio, whether he who wrought that crucifix, pointing to a plaster model of an exquisite work by Benvenuto Cellini, "used to receive samples of the latest style from Paris?"

"Not so, Laura," replied Carlo, quietly; "unhappily, alas! Paris and Florence have changed places. Benvenuto sent the Parisians samples of the newest style. That is the difference."

"No! Carlo, no! and no again. What is this vulgar thing sent here for? That you and every one on the bridge may make fifty dozen exactly like it, if you could get the order for them. Is not it true? And do you think Cellini's works were sent to Paris with any such hope or expectation? When the French king wanted Florentine art, he had to bring the Florentine artist, I think, and not *samples*, to Paris."

"That is very true, Laura mia," said Carlo, stooping across the bench to press a kiss on the cheek that was so charmingly coloured by her disdainful mood; "but say, darling, why do you call this French brooch vulgar? Is not it very pretty?"

"It is vulgar," said Laura, nodding her graceful head, first because it *is* a sample, and may serve for one; because anybody can make another exactly like it, and as good as the



original. It is vulgar, secondly, because the value of it is more in the intrinsic cost of the material than in the workmanship; and, thirdly, it is vulgar because no sentiment went to the making of it; the maker put none of his individuality into it, and it is, therefore, as one would say of a human being, all body and no brain, and no heart."

"It is quite true," replied Carlo, "that our modern workman would turn you out as many dozen of such brooches as you choose to order, not one of which could you tell from the original. But still, modern work has its advantages and excellences. See, now, these circular lines! They are perfectly accurate. See how truly in the centre is the exact point that ought to be the centre. You know how constantly the old works, even of the first hands, are inaccurate in such matters. A lopsided circle, an untrue angle, or a false centre, would not be tolerated nowadays."

"So much the worse for those who won't tolerate them!" cried Laura. "I love the careless inaccuracies of the old workers. Their care was occupied otherwise. These little departures from mechanical accuracy mark the individuality of the artist. An artist is not a machine, to work with machine-like precision. Is one man's mind the exact counterpart of another's? Am I the same one day that I am another? I like the careless inexactitude that marks the humanity of the artist without injuring the expression of his thought, better than the precision which only shows that your compasses were in good order. But as for my poor trinket here, one of the here and there individuals of antiquarian tastes has been met with, for this is a commission for an Englishman. It came to me through Signor Raddi, at the Gallery."

"I am delighted to hear it, my own Laura!" said Carlo; "for the truth is, that I am thinking of the subject rather from the mercantile than from the artistic point of view. And you know, that if all goes well for our hopes to-morrow, as please God it will, it is in that light that we must look at it."

"Heaven grant that all may go well!" responded Laura, fervently; "but oh, Carlo, I fear, I fear. I think I shall sit here and work at my pearls all night. For then I shall think of my work and get over the hours. But I am sure I shall not sleep a wink. Sometimes it seems to come out quite clear to me, that of course my father will never consent to take off the old name that has been over the shop for three generations. You don't know how much pride my poor father has in his business."

"I think, my Laura, that when the business was, the pride was; "but both, I suspect, have been killed by the same malady," said Carlo, a little bitterly. "Besides," he added, "there is the too evident difficulty of going on, as things are. Surely your father must feel painfully anxious for the future, and will welcome a proposition which will, I trust, remove all anxiety from him for ever."

"You forget, Carlo dear, that my father feels poverty only as one does who is on the point of leaving it behind him for ever. He is well and truly persuaded that the prize, which has so often seemed within his grasp, will come at last, and that soon. And if it should, Carlo——"

"Laura! by all the saints, don't let me hear you talk in that way too! Have you not seen enough of lottery drawing and gambling by this time?" said sensible Carlo, sadly.

"But my dear father *does* understand the lottery as few others do," pleaded Laura. "And I am sure, if calculation and meditation on the cabala and the mathematics can avail, he ought to win."

"Laura! Laura! for Heaven's sake don't talk so?" groaned poor Carlo, with real alarm. "Tell me," said he, "did you ever buy a ticket, Laura? Did you ever wish to do so?"

"Surely you know, Carlo, I never did either the one or the other. I neither understand anything about it, nor ever attempted to understand it. The numbers for my terno are my own true love, my art, and my old work-bench. Papa

would tell the numbers sympathetic to all three in a minute. Will my terno come up, Carlo?" said she, with a look which made it impossible for Carlo to scold.

"Dearest," he said, "I would rather talk of our happiness under any other form. Can it be that you really have any shadow of belief in the possibility of any connexion between the numbers to be drawn out of the wheel at the lottery, and all the calculations, sympathetic numbers, and dreams that your father, and so many others, put so much faith in?"

"In truth, dearest Carlo," replied Laura, seriously, but without a particle of the animation and intense interest that had lighted up her face, and lent fire to her eyes, a few moments previously, when she had been speaking of matters of art—"in truth, dearest Carlo, I have never given the question a thought, and know, as I said, that I understand nothing about it. But—"

"Understand it, Laura!" broke in Carlo, the sceptical and the sensible; "why, it is within the comprehension of a baby."

And yet they all speak of it," rejoined Laura, humbly, "as a profound science and mystery, to be fathomed only by the longest and deepest mathematical study. See, now," she continued, "what reasons I have to believe these things, which seem to you so incredible. My dear, dear father certainly was never considered wanting in intelligence. You know, before pressing want of money led him to devote all his attention to this subject, how highly his talents were thought of by all the men of art in Florence. And years of deep study have only confirmed him more and more in the certainty of his speculations."

Carlo groaned; but not letting him interrupt her, she went on:

"Then, as you remarked yourself, my father is far from singular in his belief. How many others think like him? And then again, above all, that book which he had with him this morning. I have never so much as looked into it. But I

have often and often heard him quoting the names of the great philosophers whose calculations are there given. I know that the book states the correspondences and sympathies of numbers, and the possibility of winning in the lottery by their means, as matters of fact. And is it credible that the Government and Holy Church, which takes such ceaseless care to prevent evil books of any kind from being printed, would suffer that book to be published and sold openly to thousands of people, deluding them in the most cruel and wicked manner, if it were all false? Is this in any way credible, I say?"

Carlo's Paris-grown ideas brought to his lips some pithy expressions of his estimate of the paternal care of "Government and Holy Church," in reply to his Laura's triumphant arguments. But he suppressed them, wisely judging that so very large a dose of novel and startling doctrine, administered all at once, might be more than was good for the mental digestion of his pretty and much-loved patient. So contenting himself with inwardly resolving that a little enlightenment on these matters should reach his Laura's deeply art-instructed, but on all other subjects blank-paper mind, at some future and more convenient period, he merely said:

"Well, my sweet Laura, without pretending to give up my own ideas on the matter, I will be content if, as you tell me, you, at all events, never felt any inclination to dabble in the lottery."

"And if I had, Carlo, which I truly never had, would it not be enough for me to know that you did not approve of it?"

This, as the speaker doubtless felt, could only be answered by a very tender caress. And then it was settled between them that the all-important interview of the morrow should come off at ten o'clock, at which hour Carlo was to call on the old man for the purpose.

Of course Laura and Carlo would have sat on where they were as long as ever the two old men in the front shop chose to leave them undisturbed. But it was not long after they had

finished their business and type-reproducible talk, and had betaken themselves to very orthodox hand-in-hand moon-gazing, that the roundabout figure of Godpapa Niccolo appeared in the too narrow frame of the little doorway between the two rooms. Laudadio, he said, was especially absorbed in some calculations of the influence which the full of the moon would have on the drawing of the lottery on the following Saturday at Rome, as deducible from the numbers that came up the last time the drawing took place at Rome in the quarter of the full moon. And he had betaken himself to the room above, which was reached by a ladder-like stair constructed in the thickness of the wall. Carlo and he, he said, would go off to bed, and Laura was to close the door behind them.

The engagement between Laura and Carlo was perfectly well known to Sestini, and had his warm approbation. The hundred dollars, he said, were ready at the first intimation that the wedding was fixed. He was not aware, however, of Carlo's determination to bring matters to a crisis by the proposal the reader has heard. As they left the heavily-ironed little door, which Laura was heard barring and bolting inside, Carlo told the old Cavaliere his project, and asked his opinion as to the probability of Signor Vanni's acceptance of it.

"My opinion is," said Niccolo, "that he will gladly accept it. For when a man's head is occupied by the profound and intense studies which engross my respected friend, I have observed that he rarely troubles himself much about meaner things. A wonderful head has old Laudadio Vanni!"

"I have made much the same observation that you have, Signore Cavaliere," returned Carlo, "and it is on it that I build my hopes of success."

"I heartily wish it you, both for dear Laura's sake and your own. Good night, Signor Carlo."

"Good night, Signor Cavaliere!"

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE TERNO.

It was a Friday evening, about a month after the day of the "merenda" in the Cascine and the conversation following it, which has been recorded in the last chapter. And the same four persons were once again together in the little shop on the Ponte Vecchio. Upon this occasion, however, the party of four was not divided into two pairs, as had then been the case, but were all assembled in the larger front shop. Carlo's proposition had been duly made to the old jeweller, as had been projected; and the result had fully confirmed the sagacity of his judgment on the subject. As soon as old Laudadio had been made to understand that it was intended to assure to him a home and maintenance, together with unbounded command of his own time, and ample leisure for pursuing studies which had become his master-passion, he jumped at the proposal. All the feelings which would once have arrayed themselves in opposition to it—the citizen's pride, the artist's pride, the householder's pride—had long since died out under the blighting encroachment of the one domineering thought, like the healthful vegetation that perishes beneath the baleful shade of the upas tree. Carlo had judged rightly. The lottery, which had killed so much else, had killed all these things in the old man.

The proposed arrangements, therefore, had all been brought to bear prosperously. The marriage of Carlo and Laura was fixed for the following Sunday. It was to take place in the quiet little church of Santo Stefano, which serves as a parish church for the houses on the northern part of the bridge. After some delay and trouble, the necessary papers and certificates were all in order. Carlo, like most others of his class and generation, had not been near a confessional box for a long time. But it was necessary to do so, and to have a certificate

to that effect, before he could be married. And he had, not without considerable repugnance, gone through the ceremony, and obtained his papers accordingly. On the morrow the necessary agreements between him and old Vanni were to be formally executed before a notary ; and the neat tablet, with the words, "Carlo Bardi, Jeweller and Goldsmith," in letters of gold on a blue enamelled ground, which had been duly prepared, was to be put up over the narrow little door, in the place now occupied by the half-effaced and faded name of Laudadio Vanni, which had been written there in old-fashioned black letters on a white ground more than half a century ago. This morrow, in short, was to be a very busy day with Carlo. The goods in which he had invested his little capital for the stocking of his shop had all been purchased, some in Florence, and some in Paris. The latter were still in the custom-house ; some of the former not yet delivered. But Carlo hoped to have them all safe under his own roof by the Saturday night, and looked forward to a long day of hurry and bustle. Laura was to be equally busy in receiving the goods, arranging, cataloguing, and examining, all day long.

This Friday evening, therefore, was the last quiet hour before the marriage, and the last of the old jeweller's life as a householder and master tradesman. His lifelong friend, Niccolo, had accordingly chosen this evening to bring his congratulations—and the bride's dower.

"Here they are, my friends," said the cavaliere, producing two long rouleaux wrapped in paper, that looked as yellow as an old man's life-long treasured packet of love-letters ; "here they are, two fifties, just as I rolled them up something like twenty years ago. They have never been touched since, though many a time there has been sore need of them. But trust old Cola Sestini for that ! Sure bind, safe find ! And now, Laura mia," he added, as he put the heavy rolls into her hands, "there they are, and the keeping of them is off *my* mind."

"You know, Caro Signor Cavaliere," said Laura, "that grateful as Carlo and I are for an assistance so important to us, there is little more to be said about it than we ought to say every day. For God knows how things would have gone with us but for you. You must be tired of being thanked, and anybody else would be tired of doing the good deeds to be thanked for. Here Carlo," she added, as she put the packets into his hands, "you have not to learn now all that my godfather has been to me."

"Thanks, Signor Cavaliere, for my Laura's dower," said Carlo, as he got up to take the money, extending as he did so his right hand to the old man, "and a thousand times more thanks for your approval of our marriage. I will lock up the dollars and leave them yet a little longer in their old wrappings. But I am afraid that their long repose is very nearly over."

And so saying, Carlo proceeded to place the two rouleaux in an iron-doored strong safe, constructed in the thickness of the wall, just opposite to the staircase, which opened in the doorway between the front and back shop. Carlo turned on them the massive key of the safe, and put it in his pocket, thus exercising the first act of mastership of the house.

"Godfather, thirty-seven; dower, twenty-five; marriage, twenty-eight," cried Laudadio, rising from his old arm-chair in great and evident excitement. "The very numbers! The numbers I——" He checked himself, looking round on his three auditors with a sharp glance, half timid and half suspicious; but continued, as he paced to and fro the few steps to which the limits of the little shop confined him, muttering to himself, "Was there ever a clearer indication? It satisfies all the rules. All, all! This at least is clear. At last! at last! And yet——friends," continued the old man, reaching his hat from the peg on which it hung, "I must go out for a short time. I shall not be long. I will be with you in half an hour. Cavaliere, I shall find you here when I come back?"



Old Sestini and the young couple glanced at each other as the old man left the shop, and the former was the first to speak.

"They did come pat enough, the three numbers, it must be owned; didn't they, now! and all on the same subject, too, as one may say: godfather, dower, and marriage! Well, that *is* remarkable! Who knows, who knows!"

Carlo shrugged his shoulders, with an expression which consideration for Laura barely sufficed to keep half way between contempt and pity.

"Has he any money in his pocket, Laura?" asked he; for the errand on which old Laudadio was gone was evident enough to them all.

"Not more than a paul or two, dear Carlo, I know for certain," replied Laura; "and to-night, you know, for the last time, you won't object——"

"Nay, Laura mia, I say nothing," rejoined Carlo, rather sadly; "but as for the *last time*, I hope your father has some years of life before him yet; for a lottery player there is no *last time* till his own last hour."

"It would be hard on Vanni if he had not a ticket for to-morrow," remarked the cavaliere. "The drawing takes place in Florence, and it must be much pleasanter to see the numbers come up, one by one, than merely to read them all in a lump, two or three days afterwards. Besides, who knows? as my old friend so justly observed. I have great confidence myself in Laudadio Vanni's science. Such a head as he has!"

"But you don't avail yourself of the suggestions indicated by his science, Signor Cavaliere," said Carlo, with a dash of satire in his tone, which was quite imperceptible to the worthy ex-clerk.

"I? No, I don't. Why should I? Don't you see, Signor Carlo, I have got my crust, my cup of coffee, and my cigar, sure and safe, every day as sure as the sun rises. I *might* lose them if I were to play ever so wisely. And I could not make

Sunday begin over again when Sunday night is come, if I won the biggest terno ever played for," said the old cavaliere, with more philosophy than he guessed.

Meantime, Laudadio Vanni did not go at once, as his friends supposed he would, to the nearest lottery office, and there empty his pockets of their little all in exchange for a scrap of paper. He was in too high a state of nervous excitement for this. Those three numbers, which he had so promptly matched with the things to which they are appended in the cabalistic volume described in a former chapter, had, as he, correctly or not, persuaded himself, occurred to him in his dreams. It was, indeed, likely enough that they might have done so. The three ideas with which his "science" connected them had of course naturally enough been in his thoughts lately. And as his morbid mind incessantly and habitually fixed itself upon the numbers suggested by every incident, every object, and every idea which presented itself to him, and as these numbers were the continual subject of all his waking meditations, it is likely enough that he might have dreamed of them. At all events, to the old jeweller's diseased mind, the reiterated suggestion of these figures appeared to be proof, "plain as heavenly writ," that these were the fortunate numbers which, duly backed, would lead him on to fortune.

To minds in any degree accustomed to observe or examine the connexion of cause and effect, it seems altogether impossible that any human being, not perfectly insane, should imagine that information of the numbers about to be drawn at hazard out of a wheel should thus be communicated to him. And, in truth, the existence of such a persuasion would be utterly incredible, did we not see it existing, and actively influencing large numbers of persons, in other respects as sane as the average of mankind. A moment's consideration of the phenomenon sets one speculating as to the possible theories of these lottery devotees respecting the world they live in, the government, and the eternal and almighty governor of it; thoughts too large and serious, maybe, for this light page!

Yet they are such as necessarily and properly rise from the subject of it; and without them we should fail to appreciate duly the thick and heavy darkness of the spiritual night—a darkness surely equal to that of the “untutored mind” of any fetish-worshipping Indian—which envelopes the pupils of a “paternal” government and a dominant orthodox church.

It is difficult to imagine the nature of the workings of a mind under the hallucination which possessed poor old Laudadio Vanni. But, assuredly, doubt had no place among them. Success, the long-delayed reward of his studies, patience, and perseverance for long years, was now within his grasp! But how was he to avail himself of the great opportunity? Fortune slighted would assuredly never offer her favours a second time! Cruel, cruel fate! to place the prize within his reach just when he was unable—all but unable—to profit by the golden chance!

Tormented with these thoughts, the old man turned from the bridge, down the Via degli Archibusieri towards the Uffizi, and began pacing to and fro beneath the colonnade that faces the river. Pulling from his pocket the old leathern bag that served him for a purse, he emptied the contents into his lean and shaking hand, and counted up the amount of the various small coins. There was one paul, one half paul, a piece of two crazie, or quarter of a paul, and several of the small thin copper coins called soldi, the twentieth part of the lira, and containing twelve denari. The lira is worth eightpence; and its two hundred and fortieth part, the denaro, no longer exists in the body, but only as a money of account. These Lire, Soldi, and Denari are the originals of our £ *s. d.*, but while prosperity and progress have with us pushed up the value of the coins to pounds and shillings, they have remained in Italy, during her period of stagnation, more nearly of their original worth. So that, although Laudadio counted up one pound ten shillings and eightpence, his whole available assets amounted only to an unstatable fraction more than a shilling.

Now this sum, invested in a ticket for a terno, would, in case

of success, produce a prize of some twelve hundred crowns, or about two hundred and fifty pounds; a very large sum to Laudadio Vanni, but far from sufficient to repay him with interest all the moneys he had, in the course of his long life, sunk in lottery tickets. And he considered that Fortune owed him nothing less than this, and that she was now at last ready and willing to discharge all her debt to him, if he could only comply with the indispensable conditions. To make no more than twelve hundred dollars out of the great and sure opportunity now offered to him, seemed a stroke of misfortune and ill-luck more difficult to bear than all the disappointments his worship of the blind goddess had hitherto exposed him to. Visions of riches paraded themselves before his mind, riches which should not only bring with them all the advantages which usually accompany them, but which should triumphantly justify in the face of all Florence, and especially of his own friends and family, his wisdom and prudence, and the accuracy and value of his much-boasted science. The more he thought of all this, and the more he pictured to himself the certainty of success, the more the small sum at his disposition seemed altogether contemptible and insignificant.

“If only they would believe me!” he muttered, as he continued in increasing agitation and excitement to walk up and down beneath the dark colonnade, turning over and over in his hands the poor little coins, for which he felt a growing contempt. “If only they in their ignorance would trust the knowledge gained by half a century of study and calculation! But they are obstinate as ignorance always is. And for whose sake do I need wealth now? Not for my own, I trow. And I could make their fortune for them! All too late for me! But I could make for them a life and position such as my Laura deserves, and such as Carlo Bardi has never dreamed of! And all that is wanting is a few dollars, which they have, and of which they can have no need, till after they will have been returned to them ten-fold—a hundred-fold!—a thousand-fold!”

The old man had quickened his pace as these thoughts were passing through his mind ; and he continued his walk, even quicker and quicker for some minutes, gesticulating with his arms, and ever and anon coming to a sudden stop in his walk. At last he turned towards the bridge, and slackening his pace considerably, and bending his face more than usual to the ground, he reached the door of his own shop. He paused before putting his hand to the door ; looked with a sharp suspicious glance up and down the bridge ; pulled a check blue handkerchief from his pocket, with which he wiped the drops from his brow ; tossed, with an impatient movement, the coins he had been counting into his coat pocket, and then entered the little shop.

It was by that time about half-past nine o'clock, and the cavaliere and Carlo were thinking of saying good night. They all took it quite as a matter of course that the old man had been to the office, and had expended all the money in his pocket in a lottery ticket.

"You'll be watching the drawing to-morrow, my friend," said Sestini. "Shall I come with you ? If you will, we can meet at the café in the piazza."

"No ! I don't know—perhaps I shall not go to-morrow," returned the old man, hesitatingly ; but added, after a pause, "well ! yes ! we will go together. I will look for you at the café a little before mid-day."

Laura and Carlo had meanwhile said their good nights, and once again he and the cavaliere left the shop together.

"Let us go to bed, Laura," said the old man, as soon as ever they were gone. "You will have a long day's work to-morrow, and I am sleepy."

Laura was rather surprised to hear him say so, for his usual habit was to sit up long after she had gone to her closet over the back shop. But she made no remark, her mind being, as may be supposed, full enough of her own thoughts.

"Good night, father," she said ; "sleep well, and dream of the numbers of your terno for to-morrow ; " and so saying

she climbed the steep stair to her miniature bedroom, leaving him to follow her up the ladder-like stair.

Laudadio went to the door of the shop, opened it, and looked out anxiously, as it seemed, first in one direction, then in the other, and then closing it, put his hand to the heavy bolts and locks, which he moved, as if securing the shop for the night. Yet he turned no lock, and shot no bolt, but leaving the door thus simply closed, proceeded to climb the stairs, and entered his room over the front shop. There, instead of beginning to undress, he seated himself on the bedside, and remained perfectly still for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. Opposite to the bed was a sort of cupboard contrived in the thickness of the wall, by the side of the one small window that lighted the room. To this he then went, and from behind some articles of clothing on the uppermost shelf drew forth a large key. Having possessed himself of this, he again sat down on the bed for several minutes. He then arose, and creeping noiselessly to the stair-head, again paused there some minutes. It might have been thought impossible for the old man to have descended the steep narrow stair with the perfect noiselessness with which he contrived to do it. Once at the bottom, he rapidly, but with caution to avoid the slightest sound, poured from his lamp a drop or two of oil on the wards of the key in his hand, and then applied it to the door of the safe in which Carlo had locked the cavaliere's hundred dollars. The key was, in fact, a duplicate one, laid aside when the other had, years ago, been intrusted to Laura for the nightly custody of the more precious articles in the shop, and long since forgotten, till the recollection of it had unfortunately occurred to the old jeweller, during his pacing under the Uffizi colonnade.

In less than a minute the two rolls of dollars were in his hands, and leaving the lamp burning on the work-bench, he stealthily stepped through the doorway on to the bridge, and quietly closed the door behind him.

Laudadio Vanni had been, though a gambler during the latter part of his life, yet an upright, honourable, and strictly honest man throughout all the many years of it, and it was in vain that he strove to conceal from himself the nature of the action he was now committing. The big drops stood on his wrinkled brow, and dropped from the ends of the straggling silver locks that fell on either side of his hollow emaciated cheeks. He trembled visibly; and instead of hastening at once on his errand, he paused at the top of the bridge under the colonnade, which at that part of it leaves the river visible. It was by this time nearly half-past eleven. The lottery offices on the night previous to the drawing remain open till twelve. After the first stroke of the clocks sounding midnight, no stake could be played for the morrow's drawing. Yet still he paused. It seemed as if he were half minded to give his honour and fair name the advantage in their struggle with the demon which possessed him, of the chance that he might be too late to accomplish his purpose.

There is under the arches, in the space void of houses, at the top of the bridge, an ancient and dingy picture of a Madonna, in a wooden tabernacle against the wall, and a little dimly twinkling oil-lamp was burning before it. He examined the two rolls of money in the faint ray of light thrown by this lamp, to ascertain that there was no writing on the paper in which they were wrapped; and then turned towards the parapet, and leaning on it, again paused, while the minutes ran on quickly towards the moment at which the power of the tempter would be at an end. It wanted now but ten minutes of the time. But there is no part of the city in which that is not more than ample time enough for reaching a lottery receiving-house. The paternal government takes care that the demon of play shall be ever at every man's elbow.

"What would they think of me," he cried, suddenly—"what would they think of me, if they knew all that I know, and knew, also, that I hesitated to obtain the prize for them?"

The money won with their money will be all theirs, of course. When I give it them, I shall say, 'Now will you believe that your old father's days and nights of study are worth something.' "

And as he muttered thus to himself, he hurried to the well-known counter, and thrusting himself among the crowd of wretches who were staking the halfpence they had succeeded in procuring just in time, he startled the clerks by putting down his two rouleaux for a terno on the numbers 37, 25, and 28.

The officials in these hells are not unaccustomed to strange sights. Remark on them in no wise enters into their functions. So the money was swept up; and the vile-looking little strip of coarse grey-blue paper was duly scrawled over, signed, sanded, and put into his shaking hand.

As he quitted the den, the great bell of the Palazzo Vecchio began to toll twelve. The yawning clerks shut up their books, and "the game was made" for that week.

After having carefully secured the precious document in an inner pocket, Laudadio's first movement was to return to his home, and he began to walk in that direction. But his steps became slower and slower, and by the time he had reached the foot of the bridge, he felt that he could not endure to pass the remaining hours of the night in the stillness of his little room over the shop. He felt a strange reluctance, too, to enter his house again, and pass by that safe in the wall at the bottom of the stairs. No! he would go home no more, till he should go in with his triumph and his justification in his hand. So he turned back once more towards the Uffizi colonnade, and again paced forwards and backwards under the now silent and deserted porticos.

But strangely enough, the result of the desperate stake he had played for, which had seemed to him so safe and certain an hour ago, while the "to be or not to be" was still in his own hands, began, now the fatal step was taken, and the irrevocable die cast, to appear less inaccessible to doubts as



to the issue. It was one of those revulsions of feeling which the most compendious scheme of ethical philosophy loves to ascribe to the immediate action of the traitorous fiend; but which the students of mental phenomena would attribute to the sense of powerlessness which takes possession of us on the completion of an irrevocable deed, aided, in poor Laudadio's case, by the importunate reproaches of his conscience. It was in vain that he repeated again and again to himself that he was only doing far better for his child with her money than she could do for herself; in vain that he argued that as her father he had some right to act for her, and watch over her interests. The genuine utterances of the still small voice are less easily overborne and put down than the dictates of the intellectual powers. The old man might succeed in persuading himself that the numbers to be drawn from the lottery wheel on the morrow were revealed to him by his walking and sleeping dreams; but he could not for an instant bring his conscience to absolve him for the deed he had done. The great prize for which he had been hoping for so many years, was now, as he told himself again and again, as good as won; a greater prize, indeed, than he had ever hoped for, for he had never before had the power of risking so large a sum at one time. Yet probably never in his life had Laudadio Vanni passed a more miserable hour than that which he spent in his midnight pacing under the colonnade of the Uffizi.

At length, wearied in body as well as in mind, he betook himself to the great "loggia" of the piazza. Every one who remembers Florence, remembers this magnificent structure by Orcagna, its wonderful noble arches, and the assemblage of masterpieces in marble and bronze collected beneath its lofty roof. At the back of the building a broad stone bench runs along the wall, and on that Laudadio stretched the long length of his gaunt and weary limbs to await the coming of the dawn. Many a worse sleeping-chamber might be lighted on by a weary man than that masterpiece of archi-

ture, proportion, and beauty, all open as its vast arches are to the mild breeze of the Italian summer night. But no bed of down could have brought sleep that night to the old lottery gambler. The stake to be decided by the events of the morrow was too tremendous a one to him. For it will be readily understood that now—strangely inconsistent creatures as we are—the amount of money to be won was the least important part of the interest that for Laudadio hung on the dirty scrap of paper in his pocket.

At last, towards morning he fell into an uneasy doze, from which he was awakened soon after dawn by the workmen coming to erect the scaffolding for the ceremony of the drawing. The grand “loggia” of Orcagna, in the principal square of the city, is the spot chosen for this purpose, and the carpenters and upholsterers were come to make their preparations. Many a condemned man has been waked from his last earthly sleep by the noise of the erection of a scaffolding for a more terrible, though scarcely less pernicious purpose, and has met the coming day with more apathy than Laudadio felt at these preparations for his triumph or intolerable overthrow! How to get through the next six or seven hours? That was now the most immediate question. Remain quiet, he could not. Besides, he was too well known in Florence; and it would have been too strange, perfectly well as his devotion to the lottery was known to all the world, for him to have been found there at that hour of the morning. So he slunk away from the piazza, and passing through the obscure streets which lie at the back of the Palazzo Pubblico, reached the large square in front of the church of Santa Croce. The vast building was already open, and at a far altar in the transept a few old men and women were hearing, or rather looking at, a morning mass. Here a seat, silence, and solitude were to be had; and Laudadio entered the church and seated himself in a dark corner of the transept, opposite to that in which mass was being said. Here the deep silence of the place, and the fatigue of his sleepless

night, gave him the advantage of a couple of hours of forgetfulness. It was nearly eight when he awoke ; and he thought he might then venture to go and look at the preparations in the square. He found all there in readiness. There was the gaily-decked raised platform, like a box at a theatre, with its seat for the magistrates, the lofty board prepared for the exhibition of the winning numbers, and the music-desks for the band ; and above all, there was the wheel in the front of the box, looking like a large barrel-churn, only made of mahogany, and ornamented with brass mountings. In Naples, there would have been also a place for the priest, who, in that country, always attends on these occasions "to keep the devil from interfering with the numbers." But in less religious Tuscany this precaution is omitted. All was ready ; but the hours, as it seemed to Laudadio, *would* not move on. He returned once again to Sante Croce, and finding it impossible to sit still, occupied himself with strolling about the immense church, and endeavouring to meet with the important numbers, that were so deeply engraved on his brain, in the many inscriptions on the walls and pavement of the building.

In the mean time, Laura had risen early to begin the various work of her busy day. The lamp which her father had left burning had burned itself out. But the unlocked and unbolted door, and the absence of the old man's hat from its accustomed peg, showed that he had gone out. There was nothing to surprise her much in this. She knew that he was apt to be restless on the morning when the lottery was about to be drawn in Florence, on which occasions he was always sure to play. She doubted not, that when he had left them on the preceding evening, he had gone to buy a ticket with the few pauls he had in his pocket, and supposed that he had gone for a morning stroll to walk off his restlessness. Carlo was to be most part of the day at the custom-house, receiving and passing the goods from Paris, and she did not expect to see him till the evening.

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So she quietly set to work to arrange, inventory, and ticket a parcel of jewellery that had come in the day before.

Laudadio had firmly determined that he would not leave Santa Croce till the clock should strike the quarter to twelve. Never did hours appear so interminable to him. Yet as they wore away, and the moment, big with fate, approached, he trembled at the nearness of the minute that was to decide his fate. He had found in the adjoining cloister the gravestone of some one who had died at the age of *thirty-seven*, on the *twenty-fifth* of the month, in the year eighteen '*twenty-eight*. The combination thus met with appeared to him a wonderful confirmation of the justice of his expectations. He was much comforted and strengthened by it; and had several times wandered back into the cloister to gaze on the auspicious numbers. He was standing thus dreamily staring at them, when the long-expected quarter to twelve was tolled from the convent belfry. He started, and all the blood in his body seemed to rush back to his heart. It appeared to him that he would fain have yet had one of those hours which had passed so laggingly interposed between him and the moment which now, at the last, he could not prevent himself from regarding with as much of sickening dread as of hope.

He left the church, however, at once, and walked with a quicker step than usual to the café in the piazza, at which he had agreed to meet his faithful friend and admirer, Sestini. The placid little cavaliere was at his tryst, calmly sipping a glass of water into which he had poured the remaining third of his little cup of black coffee, after regaling himself with the other two-thirds neat and hot; a favourite mode with the Italians of spreading the enjoyment derivable from three-halfpenny-worth of coffee over as large a space of time as possible. Sestini, little observant as he was, could not help noticing the excited manner, the haggard look, and the feverishly gleaming eye of his friend. It still wanted a few minutes of the hour, and Sestini tried to persuade the old man

to take some refreshment before going out into the crowd with which the great square was by this time full. But he could not induce him even to sit down. So the two strongly-contrasted old men went out to make their way through the crowd to the immediate front of the hustings prepared for the drawing. The figure and face of the old gambler, stooping with hoary age, yet expressing in every shaking movement and every restless glance an excess of highly-strung nervous excitement, might well have caused remark at any other time or place. But amid the crowd in front of the lottery-wheel every one was too much occupied with self, and strangely-moved faces were too common to attract attention.

The band had already begun to play a noisy lively air; the three magistrates in their gowns and high round flat-topped cloth caps were in their places; and two little boys in gay fancy dresses were standing one on each side of that terrible wheel—the instrument of torment little less in amount and in intensity than that caused by the other instrument of the same name the express object of which was torture. And now began the tedious process of unfolding the little rolled-up scrolls containing the numbers, holding them up to the public view, calling them aloud, handing them from one to the other of the presiding functionaries, and finally dropping them one by one into the wheel. And once again Laudadio thought that the minutes went slowly, and that the preliminary formalities would never be completed.

But at length the whole tale from One to Ninety had been deposited in the wheel. The music sounds; the little boys churn away at the fateful churn; two or three turns have tumbled the numbers into a confusion sufficient to make—to all human ken—CHANCE the sole blind master of the position of them; and then, amid sudden and profound silence, the first number is drawn. The boy plunges his bared arm into the machine, brings out one rolled-up scroll between his finger and thumb, holds it aloft, and passes it, always keeping his hand at arm's length, to one of the presiding trio. He unrols

it, proclaims aloud "EIGHTY-EIGHT," hands it to his colleague, who holds it up aloft open to the people, and passes it to the third officer, who affixes it to the conspicuous board provided for the purpose. Then out blare the trumpets again, and out bursts a tempest of tongues. Nothing is lost yet. Five numbers are to be drawn; and there is yet room for a terno to come up—and to spare. Those, indeed, who have betted that some other number would come up *first* (which is termed playing an "estratto determinato")—those, indeed, have already lost; but for all others "the game is still alive."

Again the music ceases, and again every voice is suddenly hushed. The same mode of operation is repeated, and this time "TWENTY-FIVE" is called aloud, and takes its place on the board by the side of its predecessor.

Again the music and the roar of voices burst forth.

"It's right!" said Laudadio to his sympathizing friend, in a faint and choking voice. "Oh yes! it's all right. I have no doubt; none." And Sestini could feel the old man's arm shaking as if he had been struck by sudden paralysis.

Once again the ceremony is repeated, and "37" is the result.

"I knew it! I knew it!" cried the old man, trembling all over, while the big drops of perspiration started to his brow. "Oh! there could be no doubt. Of course I was certain of it." And drawing from his pocket with difficulty, so violently were his hands shaking, the ticket with his numbers, he showed them to his friend, carefully hiding with his lean old hand the sum for which the ticket was made out.

"Ah, my dear friend," said the little cavaliere, "if you had only played for an ambo, you would have been all right." (The ambo is when *two* numbers are named to come up.) "An ambo makes a nice little bit of money. I wish it were an ambo."

"Why an ambo?" returned Laudadio, fiercely. "I tell you my terno is certain—certain!"

By this time all hope is over for the majority of the crowd,



and the silence for the drawing of the fourth number is by no means so general. Now for it. "56."

A long deep breath came from the old gambler's chest with a sound almost of a groan, and he closed his eyes for a minute. "But it will be all right, I tell you," he said angrily, as if his companion had maintained the reverse. "I tell you it is sure. It can't fail me now. It can't!"

And now for the last number—the cast of fortune that was to make all safe or all lost. It was a tremendous moment for the old man. The music and the voices sounded strangely in his ears, as if they were far off. Now, silence! Now!

"*Twenty-NINE!*" shouted the officer.

\*For one short moment, as the syllables "twenty" reached his ears, the unhappy old man had imagined that all was well with him. Then came, with a roar, as it seemed to him, of a mighty tempest wind rushing through his ears, and crushing him to the earth, the fatal sound that hurled him from the summit of his hopes into an abyss of misery.

"What a pity it was not an ambo," said Sestini, not dreaming that the disappointment was a greater or more important one than the veteran gambler had a thousand times had to bear. But the revulsion was too terrible for old Laudadio's over-excited nervous system. After gazing for a moment with a fixed glassy stare into his companion's face, his long attenuated body swayed to and fro like a tall tree whose foot the axe has nearly severed, his gripe on the cavaliere's arm relaxed, and he fell in a dead swoon on the flagstones of the piazza.

Poor little Sestini was extremely shocked and frightened. The crowd of course formed a ring round the prostrate figure of the old man, whose hat had fallen off, and whose long white locks were straggling over his livid face. For a moment they thought that he was dead. But the heaving of his chest soon indicated that he had but fainted. Many of those around knew old Laudadio Vanni, the jeweller on the Ponte Vecchio, and understood perfectly well the cause of his present trouble.

"Poor fellow! he will have been playing high!" said one. "He's one that the Madonna owes a good terno to before he dies!" remarked another. And Sestini, with the aid of three or four of the nearest bystanders, proceeded to carry him to his house on the neighbouring bridge. He probably had regained his consciousness before he reached his home. But his eyes remained closed, and he suffered himself to be carried by those who had picked him up. The fatal ticket remained clutched in his hand, and having been taken from it by Sestini, after those who carried him had placed him in his chair and departed, sufficed to tell very shortly the whole facts of the case.

And the remainder of our story may be told almost as compendiously.

Carlo took the matter very much more coolly than Laura had dared to hope. He said that such things were necessarily to be expected from lottery playing, and—that a new lock, to which he would see himself, must be put on the strong safe.

Sestini remarked that there were few heads in Italy, save that of his friend, who could have discovered *within one* the very numbers to be drawn for a terno. And Laudadio observed that loss in the lottery was number 90.

The marriage took place duly on the Sunday, despite the loss of Godpapa Sestini's dower. And the business-like Carlo and his artist wife have long since ceased to feel the need of such a sum.

Old Laudadio lived several years after the loss of his last great stake. Did that miscarriage serve to open his eyes or cure him of his malady? Any one who is doubtful on such a point has happily little knowledge of the insanity in question.

The present writer has had an interview with Laudadio Vanni. It took place one bright and frosty moonlight night on the "Ponte Trinità." It was late, and there was no other person on the bridge. The striking but shabby-looking old man,

courteously lifting his hat, addressed himself to the deponent, and stating that he had something of importance to communicate, proceeded to propose a partnership enterprise in the lottery; the conditions to be, that the deponent should furnish the funds for the purchase of a ticket, while he, Laudadio would supply numbers dreamed of by him, and warranted to win.

The deponent, deeming the old man no better than a self-conscious and designing swindler, punished him by saying that he approved perfectly of the scheme, only that he would prefer to reverse the parts. But had he known the history, which he learned on mentioning his rencontre to some Florentine friends, and which has been set forth in the preceding chapters, he might probably have treated the old lottery dreamer more gently.



**ZUAN THE GONDOLIER.**



## ZUAN THE GONDOLIER.\*

ON a black and stormy night of October an old man lay dying in his own house, in a little court in the city of Venice. It was a peculiar court—not one of the little “campi” or “campielli” which are so common in the Sea City, and which answer to what in other Italian cities are called “piazze” or “piazzette”—the squares and courts of our own towns. It had been the cloister of a long-since suppressed monastery, the ownership of the buildings of which had passed into private hands. The church, an interesting Gothic brick building of the thirteenth century, is, was then, and for many years had been, used as a warehouse, and the adjoining cloister had been let off or sold off into a number of humble private dwellings. In one of these—one of the best of them—old Jacopo Parrayich had long lived, and was now dying.

A very picturesque spot is the old cloister—dear to artists—though so hidden away in the labyrinth of Venetian “calle,” or lanes, as to be unknown, and nearly unfindable by the passing tourist. And yet it is so near to the “Salute,”—the superb domed church at the head of the Grand Canal, which all the world knows,—that the huge towering dome of the more recent church, Longhena’s masterpiece, can be seen from the little cloister raising its head insolently far above the old degraded church of the monastery, which had belonged to a much better period of architecture. Doubtless the

\* Zuan is Venetian for Juan, or Giovanni.

cloister, in a picturesque point of view, is far prettier now than it was when inhabited by its original possessors. The beautiful marble columns, with their exquisitely carved capitals, remain, though yellow with dirt and smoke and festooned with cobwebs. One or two only of the charming Venetian Gothic windows of the rooms above the cloister walk remain ; but the habits of the dwellers in them have filled the windows with masses of varied colour—flowers or curtains, or articles hung out to dry—which, harmonised and poetised by the light of a Venetian sky, add just the amount of living tints to the sombre old architecture that an artist requires for his purpose.

But on the October evening in question they were harmonised by no such light, and the appearance of the little cloister and the dwellings around it were sombre and dreary-looking enough. The place itself, from the form and nature of its construction, was much sheltered from the tempest ; but the fierce beating of the water in the Grand Canal close at hand against the foundations of the palaces which inclose it, and against the huge marble steps of the Salute, could be heard amid the roaring of the wind, as it rushed from the lagoon up the channel of the Grand Canal with a force that made even the passing of a gondola from one side of it to the other almost, if not quite, impossible. For little as the fine-weather tourist, luxuriously reclining in his gondola on the placid lagoon, may imagine it, there are times when even the small canals can be navigated by gondolas only with extreme difficulty, and not a gondolier in Venice would think of venturing into the wider and more exposed Grand Canal. For the Adriatic is still the “*iracunda Adria*” of the ancient poet, and Venice, queen of it though she be, is now and then not a little afraid of her turbulent subject.

And it was on such a night that the long life of the old Jacopo Parravich had found its last sundown—an ending not inappropriate to his past life, as some of the older gossips of the cloister whispered to one another. Only two or three of



the older inhabitants, whose lives were also near their close—for old father Parravich had for a long time past—ever since he had lived in the cloister, indeed—been a most respectable man—the most highly respectable man in the little community, indeed. And as to the doings of his younger days, he had doubtless repented of them, or had, in truth, forgotten them—which, of course, came to much about the same thing. But other folks do not forget all that they ought to forget so readily as we might wish them to do. And the *chronique scandaleuse* of the locality had preserved stories of the long-ago times when Jacopo Parravich had been one of the most desperate and boldest smugglers of the coast. He was, as his name indicates, a Dalmatian by origin, like so many others of the inhabitants of the Sea-born City, and, like so many of his original countrymen, had been a first-rate sailor.

Well, a smuggler! What's that? Public opinion, especially under such a government as that which then ruled Venice, easily forgives sins against the fisc. But then a bold smuggler may have, in the prosecution of his business, to do deeds that                      In short, there *were* old stories. But Signor Parravich, well to do, and with his nest well feathered, had long been, as has been said, a most respectable man and citizen.

He was such a respectable man, that, as sometimes happens, the weight of his respectability had fallen rather heavily on the members of his family. These consisted, at the time of which we are speaking, namely, the night on which the old man died, of one son and one daughter, the children of his old age; for the old man had passed his seventy-fifth year, but his son Jacopo was only twenty-six, and his daughter Zerlina only nineteen. Old Jacopo Parravich had married late in life—in the days of his respectability—and he had been a widower for the last fifteen years.

Now the way in which the burthen of their father's respectability had fallen heavily on his son and daughter had

been that in which similar misfortunes so often manifest themselves—the chapter of love and marriage. Old Parra-vich, to whom wealth and respectability and a son and heir had come all pretty well together, was very desirous that his son should, in the matter of taking a wife, take at the same time a step in the social ladder. There had not been wanting to the young man an opportunity of doing so, had he chosen to profit by it. Had he so chosen at a time now about five years ago, he might have married a rich wife and settled down at home, with nothing else to do in life than to go to the café every day, to the theatre every Sunday, and *flaner* on the Great Square of St. Mark all day long. But the bright laughing eyes and lithe undulating figure of Ninetta Ponti, the fisherman's daughter at St. Peter's, out beyond the Arsenal, had come between him and this promotion, and rendered it impossible for him. The result had been a very terrible quarrel between him and the masterful old man, his father; and young Jacopo, shaking the dust off his feet, and swearing that he would rather earn wherewithal to keep a wife of his own choosing than take one chosen for him, even with all the above enumerated advantages, had gone back to his profession—the sea—and was at the present time absent on a voyage as second mate on board a Levantine trader. He had gone, and had taken with him his father's formally-pro-nounced curse, more especially fulminated and declared to be eternal and irrevocable if he should ever marry the daughter of Zacaria Ponti, the fisherman at St. Pietro.

And a father's curse, so pronounced and motived, though it had not availed to keep the young man at home and bend him to obedience, was yet a very heavy and terrible thing to the young Venetian. A Florentine would have laughed to scorn any such bugaboo attempt to interfere with his free will. But it is not in Venice as it is in Florence. Feelings of religion are not dead there among the people as they are at Florence. Old respects, old beliefs, old superstitions are still powerful, not only among the women, but among the men of

the ancient Sea City, to a greater degree perhaps than they are in any other part of the peninsula. So young Jacopo Parravich, though unyielding, had gone away very heavily burthened by his father's curse, and made still further miserable by the conviction that, even if he should decide to disregard such an obstacle, his timid and gentle little Ninetta would never be brought to consent to a marriage so barred.

As for poor Zerlina, she of course could not meet her father's commands with similar rebellion, though they had been laid on her in a manner equally grievous to her. For two reasons she could not. In the first place it was, of course, impracticable for her to walk out of her father's house and carve her own way in the world. And in the second place, maidenly modesty, and perhaps it may be said, a touch of maidenly coquetry, made such a line of action impossible to her; for it was the same fertile topic of difference between seniors and juniors which had occasioned stern words of prohibition, none the less galling because Zerlina declared that they were needless, from her father to her.

In truth, it could not but be admitted that the suit of Zuan Contarin for the hand of Jacopo Parravich's daughter was a very bold one; for Zuan, despite his patrician name, was but a gondolier. He was, however, about the best representative of his class in all Venice—the most able, the most steady, and the most prosperous. His tall and slender, yet vigorous and wiry Venetian figure was a picture, as he stood in his white jacket and trousers and scarlet sash on the high poop of his gondola, skilfully piloting it among a crowd of craft of all sorts. His gondola, handsome, and thoroughly well appointed in all respects, was his own. It had been a hard struggle to save up the nine hundred or a thousand francs needed for the acquisition of the gondola. But that point once gained, matters soon began to go better with Zuan, and he had already commenced the crescendo process of saving money. In the preceding summer he had been the winner in a Murano regatta, having easily distanced all his competitors in

the course from the Lido to the mouth of the Murano canal. And that stroke of good fortune had added some hundred francs to his store at one blow.

For all that, it was certainly somewhat audacious of Zuan to lift his eyes to the Signorina Zerlina Parravich; and the retired smuggler was scandalised and indignant at the audacity. Zerlina, in her heart of hearts, was neither scandalised nor indignant. Indeed she did not even pretend to be so. But

Zerlina was a spoiled child, and a beauty; and in the somewhat capricious exercise of her sovereign rights as such she inflicted many a heartache upon poor Zuan. "*Si la jeunesse savait!*" If Zuan had had the experience of forty instead of only twenty years, he might have known that Zerlina loved him. If he had been less modest, and less strongly impressed by a sense of his own unworthiness of such a prize, he might have guessed the truth. But, as it was, the capricious and wayward beauty had chosen to try her lover's constancy by exercising him with alternate hopes and fears, till Zuan had, on a hundred occasions, half made up his mind to seek a service on a long-sea merchantman, and bid adieu to love and Venice for ever!

This was the state of things when Parravich, who had never known a day's illness in his life, was stricken down, and felt sure that his time was come.

It was about an hour after sundown, and the dying old man and his confessor were alone together in his chamber looking into the little cloister. Zerlina was sitting, tearful and frightened, on the top stair of the flight which led down into the cloister walk, a few feet from the door of her father's room, and the woman who had been sent in by the doctor to nurse him had seized the opportunity of slipping down into the cloister to talk over the state of things with a knot of the women below, and was enjoying the pre-eminence in gossiping to which position and opportunities entitled her.

Of course the first thing to be done, when the old Venetian felt that his hour was come, was to send for his confessor. It

was not that his conscience was very heavily burthened by the recollection of certain lawless and violent deeds of his younger days. These matters were so long ago; they lay so far behind him. And they had all been in the way of business. But there was a matter which lay very heavy on his heart, the curse which he had pronounced on his only son, and the sad and unforgiving manner in which they had parted—now, or it would seem for ever! Nor did the teaching and words of his ghostly adviser differ much from the promptings of his own heart in this respect. The old sins were, the confessor was confidently assured, entirely repented of. Of course they were, when for long years past no temptation to the repetition of them had existed. And absolution on all these heads was duly and fully accorded. But then came this knot of the difficulty. The old man had not forgiven his son. It was true that he was miserable because he had *not* forgiven him—would only be too happy to forgive him, on due submission made. But there was still that at the inmost heart of the strong-willed and masterful old man that made free forgiveness, coupled with the knowledge that his son was to be left free to follow his own devices on the subject which had sat so near the old man's heart, that made the needful frame of mind impossible to him. And the exact state of the case was as plain to the trained moral pulse-feeling of the skilled confessor as if it had all been written on the penitent's forehead. The priest, as it happened, was an earnest and scrupulous man; and he could not feel himself justified in telling his penitent to depart in peace, unless he could succeed in first changing his heart in this respect. The old man writhed in his bed, and the sweat broke out in big drops on his furrowed brow. He wrestled hard. But the black drop was at his heart, and the evil will was too strong for him.

It seemed likely that his passing would be like that of Lorenzo de' Medici when Savonarola required of him, as the condition of absolution, that he should, so far as his will went, restore liberty to Florence. All else the dying tyrant could

accord. But that was beyond him. And he turned his face to the wall, and died unannealed.

To the old smuggler the case was a hard one. The probing of the good priest was too searching for him ! He, too, turned his face to the wall ; but the faithful soul-physician did not give up his struggle with Satan.

Just at that conjuncture, hurried steps of several persons were heard from the cloisters below. And in the next minute the old nurse came into the room, saying that one of the neighbours urgently desired to speak to the dying man. The tidings he brought were to the effect that the ship in which young Jacopo Parravich sailed had been signalled from Malamocco. He knew the fact from the broker under the Procaratie Vecchie, to whom the vessel was consigned. The real discoverer and sender of the news was old Pietro Ponti, the fisherman, Ninetta's father, who had heard of the ship's arrival an hour or two ago from a boatman who had just come in from the Lido with difficulty through the storm. But he knew too well that it would not be wise for him to be the bearer of the news. So he sent it to the dying father by one of his neighbours.

Yes, Jacopo's ship and Jacopo were at Malamocco, the port at the entrance of the lagoon. But there was not the smallest chance that the pilot would dream of attempting to bring the vessel into the lagoon and to Venice in the face of the tempest that was then raging. No doubt by the evening of the following day she would be anchored in front of the Riva degli Schiavoni. But old Jacopo felt all too surely that that would be too late for him !

"What is it to me," said the old man bitterly, "whether he is at Malamocco or at the world's end ? One is as far off as t'other such a night as this ; and I shall never see the morning ! If I could but see him, I " The unhappy man turned wearily in his bed, and moaned aloud.

Zerlina had accompanied the bringer of the news to the door of her father's room, and comprehended the whole of the

circumstances and bearing of the situation in a moment. A sudden thought dashed through her brain. But it was a thought that first caused the tide of her blood to rush violently to her neck, her cheeks, her forehead, till she felt it tingling in her ears, and at the roots of her hair, and then as suddenly to retreat to the heart, leaving her fair oval face as white as marble beneath the glossy braids of her dark hair.

Was there no possible way by which her brother might be brought to that bedside before to-morrow's dawn, when so much, so terribly much for the eternal weal of the one man and for this world's happiness for the other might depend upon that meeting? *No way!*

Zerlina thought there might be one possibility—one, and one only! But the thought, as has been seen, was not one that commended itself to easy and welcome acceptance.

Zuan Contarin could take his gondola to Malamocco, and bring back her brother in four or five hours! If there was not another gondolier in Venice who would attempt the task, Zerlina felt the most perfect assurance that Zuan could do it, and *would* do it . . . if she chose to ask it of him.

Ay, but *could* she bring herself to do that asking? She had been cruel to him at their last meeting. It had been the evening of a festa—a rare holiday for Zuan. And, dressed in all his best (and how handsome Zerlina thought he looked!), he had timidly proffered his petition to be allowed to escort her to the Lido, where there were to be gala doings and fireworks. But Zerlina had tossed her head, and told him that it was quite out of the question; she was engaged to go with Signore Marco Tron. He was the son of a rich jeweller, who wore broadcloth and a chimney-pot hat, which was certainly more fitted than a poor man's jacket to consort with Zerlina's holiday muslin dress, and killing little hat, and boots with heels as high as any lady's in the land. Poor Zuan had slunk away, and watched her privily as young Tron led her to a gondola. And Zerlina had caught sight of him,

and with a toss of her head had instantly begun talking and laughing with her companion with every appearance of the utmost enjoyment. And what a bore she had found young Tron! And now, as the punishing idea suggested itself to her mind for an instant of the amount of help that could be got from *him* in her present strait, ah! how ineffably contemptible and null he seemed to her in comparison to her lover of low degree!

But, after all this (and much previous treatment of the same sort), *could* she go to Zuan, and ask him to do this thing . . . for her sake? *For her sake!* For though her confidence was boundless in Zuan's prowess and skill, she knew well enough that the task was not one which any human being in Venice would undertake save for some such motive as that which she knew well "for her sake" would be to Zuan. Could she bring herself to do this?

Reserving the reply to this question for yet farther consideration, during the walk she meditated, and whispering to herself, "For life and death! for life and death! for more than life and death! for poor old father's soul!" she hurriedly put on her cloak, tied her handkerchief over her head, and quietly slipped out of the house, saying no word to any one, and unnoticed by any.

She knew well where Zuan was to be found. He lived with his widowed mother, who was the portersess and care-taker of a huge old empty palace in one of the little "campi" behind the Riva degli Schiavoni, as the long quay is called which faces the island of St. Giorgio Maggiore and the lagoon. The owner of the once splendid, but now dilapidated, house in question lived in Paris, and old mother Contarin had for many years had the care of it. And her son had the advantage of gratuitous lodging in the rooms on the ground-floor occupied by his mother. She might have lodged half a dozen more sons there, if she had had them, without any injury done to the owner, or objection on his part. And on such a night as that Zuan was very sure to be at home. It would have needed



a long walk for Zerlina to reach the part of the town to which she was bound at a period a few years earlier, for she would have had to go all round by the Rialto, seeing that not a man at the "traghetto" would have attempted to pull her across the Grand Canal.

But the much-abused iron bridge, raised by an English engineer and speculator, in the immediate neighbourhood of the far-famed Gallery of the Belle Arti, stood her in good stead, though she almost thought she should have been blown off it as she crossed. Holding hard on to the rail, she made the passage, however, in safety, and found herself at the door of old Anna Contarin's porter's lodge almost sooner than she wished. For her reluctance to the task before her was extreme, and she had made no progress in determining in what words she would put the matter before her lover.

"Madrè di Dio!" exclaimed Zuan, coming to the door, "la Signorina Zerlina! on such a night as this!"

"What has happened, *ragazza mia*?" said the old woman, who knew too much of Zerlina's treatment of her son to wish to be specially civil to her. "You look as if you had seen the ghosts of all the unbelieving Jews who lie buried on the Lido! You are as white as any ghost yourself. In God's name what is the matter?"

"Father is very ill," said Zerlina, catching at the chance of addressing herself in the first instance to the mother instead of to the son; "he is so ill that he is dying. The doctor says that he cannot live through the night."

"Cospetto! And he looking but the other day as if he would live for a hundred years!" exclaimed the old woman.

"If I had only known that there was trouble in your home, Signorina Zerlina! To think of your coming out such a night as this! But of course you are wanting help. Shall mother go with you to help nurse Signor Jacopo? Only say what we can do to be useful to you. Ah, Zerlina! don't you know that I would give my eyes to have the pleasure of serving you?"

"Father sent me, Signor Zuan," began Zerlina, who was now as violently red as she had been white before, "father sent me to say       " Then, suddenly struck by the unworthiness of such a pretence, and of the feeling that prompted her to wish to obtain the services of Zuan on any ostensible terms save those which were in very truth to be the price of them, she checked herself; and becoming yet more scarlet in the face, and casting her eyes on the ground, added, "No! not that! poor father! he is too ill to do that,       but he is sadly, terribly in want of what no one but a gondolier, such as is hardly to be found in all Venice, can do for him, and       and I thought       "

"A gondolier! Eccomi! of course you know that anything one of my trade could do       "

"To serve a dying man for his soul's welfare?" said Zerlina, venturing a glance up into his eyes.

"His soul's welfare!" said Zuan, with a curious air of mixed reverence and disappointment. "Be it what it may, Signorina Zerlina, I am ready Only say what is needed."

"Poor Jacopo is come back! His ship is signalled. She lies in Malamocco harbour. You know how father and he parted. Father can't bring himself to forgive him; and the priest will not give him absolution. And       oh, if Jacopo could only come to him before it is too late! Father said, as he lay moaning fit to break your heart, 'if only he could see him!' But father will be dead before morning."

And Zerlina dropped her head upon her bosom, and looked fixedly on the ground.

"If he can't live till morning, and a bit longer," said the old woman, "he'll never see Jacopo again, that's certain. As well be at Smyrna as at Malamocco such a night as this. You don't suppose the ship is going to come in to-night, do you?"

"But Jacopo may be fetched! To be sure! That's what a gondolier can do! Of course! In five hours from now, Signorina Zerlina, Jacopo shall be here," said Zuan, with joyous

alacrity, preparing instantly to set about the task before him. "The gondola is at the riva!" he added.

"Are you mad, stark mad?" cried the old woman, "and are you not ashamed, girl, to come here tempting an only son to risk his life? You who . . ."

"Hush, mother! Risk my life? Not a bit of it! But if it were to risk my life"

Here he shot a glance at Zerlina's face, the magnetism of which was too strong for her to avoid a momentary raising of her eyes to meet his

"And for the sake of a passing soul!" added Zuan, with a tone of pious awe.

"A passing soul! For the sake of a white face and a pair of brown eyes, which were always too proud to look on you, you poor fool!" cried his mother. "You mean thing!" she went on, turning to the trembling girl; "how can you have the face to ask such a thing, and yet not the honest heart to say to a lad that worships you,—the more fool he!—'for my sake, *amor mio!*'"

"Hush, mother!" cried Zuan, now as red as Zerlina.

"It is for my sake, Zuan!" said Zerlina with tremulous lips, and not daring to look up. She had never called him simply Zuan before.

Zuan snatched her hand and pressed his lips upon it. "In five hours Jacopo shall be in Venice!"

"You shall not go!" screamed his mother.

"Not all hell should stop me! Mother, dearest mother, there is no danger beyond a wet skin. I shall be here long before morning. I promise it to you."

And with that he opened the door, and prepared to step out into the storm, which appeared to be raging worse than ever. Zerlina, without saying another word, stepped towards the door, as to accompany him.

"It is all in your way to the cloister, Signorina Zerlina. I can at least see you so far home," said Zuan, shutting the door behind him, as they both stepped out into the night; "and then . . ."

"But I must go with you in the gondola, Zuan," said Zerlina, as she gathered her cloak about her.

"You! to Malamocco! . . . this night! No! that will never do! Not for a million crowns! No, Signorina Zerlina; you must go home. I shall bring Jacopo to you."

"But is there then danger danger to life, Zuan?" asked Zerlina, taking his arm for the first time with a hand that he felt to tremble on it, though the force of the tempest might have seen a sufficient excuse for doing so before.

"Danger? well it is not a pleasant night certainly—not a night for such as you, Signorina, to be on the lagoon. Besides, it will be better to have no passenger in the boat. I shall take a spare oar for Jacopo coming back; and perhaps I may find at the riva a friend who will go with me. Two oars are better than one. But for you! No, Signorina, I can't take it upon myself to do that!"

"Please, let me go with you!" said Zerlina, with just the slightest pressure of her hand on his arm, and in a submissive tone of entreaty that seemed to Zuan's ears to alter very strangely the relative situation of both of them towards the other. For a moment he was beset by a strong temptation to accede to her request. The extraordinary monstrosity of a set of circumstances that should bring it to pass that Zerlina should sue to him, and he refuse her prayer, joined to a sudden imagination of the joy of having her under his protection, his alone in all the world, out on the wild lagoon, saving her life perchance with his strong arm around her, almost made him waver. But in the next instant good sense, the consciousness of what was right, and of what was best for her, returned in their full force, and enabled him to say—

"No, Signorina Zerlina, that cannot be; I should be doing very wrong. I don't look to any mischief. But the gondola may capsize. I should not be much the worse if

it did," he hastened to add, as he felt a tremor of her arm and a nervous clutching of her hand; "but if I failed to save you! . . . "

"Zuan! If you don't come back I should not care to live."

"Jacopo shall be brought back safe and sound, Signorina Zerlina," returned Zuan, cruel this time in his turn to the girl, who, in the stress of the moment, had cast her girlish pride of coquetry so far behind her.

"Zuan!" said Zerlina, still more palpably pressing his arm, and adding no further word. It was not said in a tone of remonstrance, but of such gentle, humble, loving appeal that to her lover's ear it was as good as a thousand.

"Zerlina!" he said. It was the first time he had ever so addressed her; and the word was unmistakably replied to by another pressure of the arm.

"I am to go with you, Zuan, . . . now and . . . ." The world that should have followed died on her lips.

"Not on the lagoon to-night, Zerlina! . . . my love, my life, soul of my life, my treasure, my best and dearest!" he cried, hurriedly rushing on the words with his tongue suddenly loosened. "See, my own treasure! here is the riva. My gondola is under that bridge. Do not let us lose time. You make haste home to your father, and tell him Jacopo will soon be here. And leave the rest to me."

"You are the master, Zuan!" she said submissively, and turned away to go. But she had not gone three steps before she turned, and again coming to his side, said:

"Zuan, I am afraid! I begin to wish that I had not asked you to do this thing. If . . . if you should not come back . . . I would give almost anything that father should see Jacopo before he dies; but not even for that would I lose you!"

She looked up into his face through the darkness as she stood by his side. It was almost an invitation. Had it not seemed so Zuan would not have taken the advantage which

the situation made for him. As it was, he threw his arms round her and pressed one long kiss, with all his soul in it, on her lips, and then turned quickly away towards his boat, saying :

“Now, my own, my own love, I am strong enough for any thing ! Have no doubt, Zerlina. In five hours you will see me again.”

Zerlina found her way back to the little dwelling in the cloister more slowly than she had come thence, musing, despite the tumult of the storm around her, and not upon the subject, near as it was to her heart, which had occupied her thoughts as she came.

Zuan jumped into his boat, and pushed out at once into the lagoon, taking no heed of the exclamations and questions of the few bystanders, who, with the constant interest of seafaring people in a storm, were standing on the riva. He made no attempt at getting any companion in his enterprise, as he had spoken of doing. He had never really intended anything of the kind. He knew too well that no inducement he had to offer would suffice to tempt any gondolier in Venice to share his task. He had only spoken of such a thing to tranquillize his mother and Zerlina. But he did take a second oar, for he reckoned on the assistance of Jacopo in coming back. Fortunately it would be on the return that the assistance was most needed, for on going out he had the tide with him. Nevertheless, the low water was a source of difficulty, for it was only by the greatest exertion and by watchful vigilance that he could avoid being blown by the wind upon one of the shoals which make the navigation of the lagoon so intricate. And this danger was added to by the pitchy darkness of the night. Nothing but such a life-long acquaintance with every inch of the lagoon, as made the knowledge of the localities seem like instinct, could have availed to keep the gondola in its proper course. And with all his thorough knowledge and all the vigour of his manhood in its prime, Zuan soon found that he had undertaken to the very full as

much as he could perform. He did, however, reach the *Divina Provvidenza*—that was the name of Jacopo's ship—in safety at the end of two hours of such labour as he had never, even in a racing struggle, undergone before. The active and skilled gondolier, having the tide with him, will, in ordinary weather, reach Malamocco in an hour. It was at the end of two long hours that Zuan, wiping the perspiration from his brow, jumped upon the deck of the *Divina Provvidenza*, to the extreme astonishment of her crew.

Meantime Zerlina had reached the shelter of the little cloister on her return. She found the nurse sitting at the bottom of the stairs, and the same knot of neighbours profiting by the godsend of a subject for endless gossip, which the event in process of completion upstairs afforded them. When would an Italian tire of sitting still, *al fresco*, and gossiping? Zerlina learned that her father had fallen asleep, utterly exhausted, and the priest had gone away, promising to return in a few hours. No questions were asked respecting Zerlina's absence. The gossips were too much engaged in their own amusement. She was wet through, and after pausing for a minute by her sleeping father's bedside, she went to change her clothes.

And all this time she found it impossible to bring her mind to bear otherwise than dreamingly, and, as it were, through a haze, upon the matters that had occupied it so entirely and so actively before she had started on her expedition. It seemed as if everything in the world had changed, as far as she was concerned, and the most pressing interest of the passing moment seemed to be listening to the roaring of the storm, and striving to estimate the probabilities of its being on the increase or on the decline in the lagoons.

She stood at the window of her little room, which looked on to the Grand Canal, gazing out into the darkness, listening intently, and apparently dreaming, but, in fact, waiting, waiting with intense anxiety—till she heard, after a while—she could not at all tell how long—voices in her father's room. He had

waked from his troublous sleep—stupor rather than sleep—and the priest had returned.

“If Jacopo wanted my forgiveness, he would have come for it! Storm! what’s the storm! The lagoons? a storm in a puddle!” moaned the old man, forgetting, in his unreason, that it was impossible that his son should know that he was dying.

Then there was a sudden running and trampling of feet in the cloister below; the priest stepped hastily to the door, and in the next minute returned to the bedside, saying, in distinct, calm tones:

“Jacopo is here. God, in his mercy, has sent him to you to receive your forgiveness and your blessing.”

And in another instant his son, with nothing but his trousers and shirt on, drenched with salt water, and the perspiration streaming from his face, was on his knees beside the dying man’s bed.

“Father, you will forgive me! You will give me your blessing!”

The dying man moved his shaking hand with difficulty, and succeeded in laying it on the wet, dark curls that covered his son’s head.

“Jacopo!” he said. “Yes, it is Jacopo! If you will promise me, my son . . .”

But here the priest broke in, strongly and resolutely, speaking with all the majesty of his office:

“Jacopo Parravich, God, in his boundless mercy and goodness, has allowed your son to come to you, that your soul may be saved from the perdition of passing to his judgment with the hideous guilt of an unnatural curse blackening your whole heart. And you make conditions! Man, dying man, who, in a few minutes, will stand before your Judge, you make conditions with God! Miserable sinner, accept the mercy offered to you. Let the blessing of peace, of charity, and of love enter your heart. Your son has risked his life to come to you. Take him to your heart, while the time is yet spared to you!”



Jacopo insinuated his arm beneath his father's head, and round his neck. In doing so his dripping shirt-sleeve touched the old man's lips.

"Salt water!" said the old smuggler. "Why, boy, you have been under water!"

"Pretty nearly, father. Zuan Contarin and I had a hard job to cross the lagoon. It was he that brought me to you. Without him I should not have known how it was with you."

"Zuan Contarin! Zuan with his gondola! Is Zuan here?" said the old man, striving to raise his head from the pillow.

Zerlina was standing at the bed-head on the farther side, and looking across it, had, from the beginning of this scene, marked her lover, who, taller by half a head than any of the others, was looking into the room from behind the little knot who were gathered at the door.

"Zuan Contarin is here, father," she said, bending down her head to whisper in his ear.

"Zuan Contarin!" said the dying man. And Zuan, coming forward, stood by the side of Jacopo at the bedside. "Zuan," continued he, gasping, "you are a brave lad! You have done me a good turn at sore need. I could have done as much once; but the lagoon *is* ugly such a night as this. I know your terms for the job, my lad. Zerlina, give him the reward he has earned."

"Here is Jacopo, papa Parravich, your son!" said Zuan, with rare thoughtfulness for others rather than himself. But his eyes were free to ask and receive Zerlina's obedience to her father's commands.

"God bless you, Jacopo, my son! It was good of you to come to me. And oh, father (to the priest), what a difference there is here!" striking his bosom as he spoke. "Zuan, Jacopo, Zerlina, God bless you, my children!"



HOW MEO VARALLA WON HIS FIRST  
LOVE.



# HOW MEO VARALLA WON HIS FIRST LOVE.

## CHAPTER I.

### AT THE "BOTTEGONE."

"I won't say 'Yes,' and I won't say 'No!' And, what is more, I won't promise to say 'Yes,' even if you get the job, and are as successful with it as you promise yourself. But I *will* promise to say 'No,' in the most negative manner possible, if, as seems to me likely enough, you don't get it!"

The speaker was Signor Giuseppe Marini, the "farmacista," or chemist and druggist, who kept a "farmacia" at the sign of the zodiacal "Scales," at the corner of one of the streets opening into the Piazza del Duomo at Florence. And the person he addressed was a remarkably handsome young man, with curly brown hair, a good blue eye, and a splendid bright-brown beard, cut in a point—not in the mean-looking imperial fashion appropriately called "a goatee," but more after the manner of our old Elizabethan gallants.

And the *locus in quo*—the place where the conversation, of which the above sentence formed the climax, took place—was the space in front of the large café, known to all the Florentine world as the "Bottegone."

The word *bottegone* means, simply, a big shop; and cer-

tainly the establishment in question is a very big shop in summer, when, according to immemorial custom in the City of Flowers, it extends itself over a large space of the flagstone of the Piazza del Duomo—the open space that surrounds the grand and truly matchless masses of the church that Brunelleschi and Arnolfo da Lapi built in obedience to the commands of the Signory of Florence, which ordered that a building should be raised such as the world had never seen before !

It must be confessed, that the architects who raised that congeries of domes, which looks as if it had grown in obedience to some interior organic law of perfect beauty, rather than been heaped together by mortal hands, bettered their instructions ; for they produced a monument of which it could not only be truly said that the world had never before seen its equal, but of which it may now be said, that it has never since seen any so truly perfect !

There stands the mighty fabric, sleeping in the soft moonlight as tranquilly as the eternal hills ; there are the vast marble steps at the west front of it, where the Florentine *monde* used, in the simple olden time, to go *aal marmi*, as they call it—go to sit on the steps on the warm summer nights, because there is always a cool breeze there ; and there, hard by, near the north-western corner of the Piazza del Duomo, is the “Bottegone.” It is no such very big shop in the winter, when it confines its business within its doors ; but on a summer night, many a square yard of the pavement in front of these doors is occupied by a crowd of little tables and chairs and forms ; and the “Bottegone,” thus quietly appropriating to its own uses a *quantum suff.* of the public domain, becomes a very big shop indeed—a very big shop, and a very pleasant one, with the cloudless star-spangled sky overhead, and the huge masses of the opposite church lying in alternate bright white moonlight and deep black shadow before one’s eyes. A pleasanter place for an evening coffee and cigar, or ice, or lemonade, it would be difficult to find on

a hot night. And if any stray Englishman, so far out of his countrymen's usual course as to find himself in Florence in July, and having a vision of Regent Street in his eye, and a sound of "Move on!" in his ear, should ask by virtue of what right the coffee-house keeper thus transferred his business to the public thoroughfare and compelled all passengers to make a long circuit round his tables and benches, he would be utterly unintelligible, not only to the frequenters of the "Bottegone," but also to the public, which placidly permits itself to be turned out of its path, and would only succeed in proving himself an insular barbarian!

At a certain table in this *al fresco* department of the "Bottegone," Signor Giuseppe Marini, the *farmacista*, was to be found every summer evening from nine to ten. No native Florentine would have ever thought of looking for him anywhere else at that hour; but if any stranger, unacquainted with the ways of Florence in general, and of Signor Marini in particular, had chanced to want the *farmacista*, he would have little difficulty in finding him, for the *farmacia* at the sign of the "Libre" was at a very little distance in the piazza.

Signor Giuseppe Marini was generally deemed to be a very warm man. He looked so, indeed, on the July evening in question, for he had loosened the voluminous white kerchief round his neck, and taken his hat from his head, and had evidently been made hotter than the July air would needs have made him, by the discussion of which the closing words have been given above. But it is not altogether in this sense that Signor Marini was a "warm man"; he had kept the *farmacia*, at the sign of "The Scales," for more than thirty years, and was understood to have made money. He looked like a man who had made money—a dry little old man, with thin lips, and shrewd, cold, grey, calculating eyes.

Every night in the year Signor Giuseppe came to the café—out-of-doors, on the piazza, in the summer, and within the walls in winter; and all the evening hours which he did not

pass at the café he passed in his shop, chatting or playing a game of cards with the medical men who sat there awaiting a summons from some patient, or with others of the gossips who used to make his shop their haunt every evening. It is a common custom in Italy, specially in its smaller towns, thus to make the shop of the chemist and druggist serve for a *salone di conversazione*. Probably the old-world practice which still prevails there in the medical profession, of practitioners sitting in the druggists' shops as places of call, where they may be found when wanted, has led to the habit.

But it may be remarked, that surely this habit on the part of the lords of the creation of passing every evening of their lives away from their own domestic firesides (only that Italians have no firesides) must make very solitary lives for the ladies of their families. Not so, always. Not so as often, perhaps, as might be expected by Teutonic-minded folks. It had not that effect in the case of the Signora Dorotea Marini, the wife of Signor Giuseppe, the farmacista.

The Signora Dorotea was many years younger than her husband, having seen not more than thirty-eight summers at the time here spoken of; and though not the slightest trace remained of the graceful slenderness of figure that had once constituted, in her own estimation, the most invincible of her personal charms, and she had become, indeed, very much the reverse of slender, she had acquired the conviction that it is quite a mistake to suppose that there is anything really attractive in a sapling-like figure; and was happy in the persuasion that the vivacious bright-black eyes, glossy black curls, full red lips, brilliant white teeth, superb and snowy shoulders, plump dimply little white hand, and foot to match, which still remained to her, composed a *tout ensemble* of irresistibility quite enough for all the necessary purposes of life.

And there could be little doubt that her great and special friend, the reverend Canon Buti, was of the same opinion. It would be exceedingly wrong to conclude, from this perhaps reprehensibly careless way of speaking of the matter, that



there was anything . . . well, that there was any reason, social, moral, or religious, why the Canon Buti should *not* visit the Signora Marini every night of her life. And all Florence would have considered the slightest smile, or shrug or other departure from the most innocent gravity of manner on any occasion when the Signora Dorotea and the Signor Canonico happened to be mentioned together, as utterly calumnious, abominable, and in the worst possible taste. Nevertheless, if one saw them together, there was that in the Canon's manner and bearing which made it impossible to doubt that he had a very lively consciousness of being by the side of a very pretty woman—and But it is all nonsense! Good heavens! Why, if any testimony were needed for the utter refutation of any breath of scandal on the subject, was there not the well-known character of the lady—a strict devotee and most dutiful daughter of Mother Church, who never missed Mass or Confession, never dreamed of touching meat on a fast-day save under proper dispensation, and who burned five candles weekly at the shrine of the Madonna of the Seven Sorrows?

Such a man as his reverence the Canon Buti, too! Was it possible that scandal should attach itself to the name of such a man as that?—a man whose propriety of life and bearing, and whose social standing, rendered him the pride of the Chapter! For the Canon Buti was a person of independent property, and was a creditable man in these days when, alas! the clergy are but too much recruited from the lower and poorer classes. It was a pleasure to see him bow with easy grace to the altar, as he stepped with dignified sweep across the choir to his stall. It was a greater pleasure still to see his bland well-formed features, portly person, and handsome silk-encased legs, stepping out with easy yet dignified vigour, as he passed, in the most irreproachable clerical attire, along the street. It was, in short, abundantly clear to all Florence that the Canon Buti was the very man to be the special friend of such a woman as the rich *farmacista's* hand-

some wife, and that La Signora Dorotea was the woman of all others whose devoted friendship was needed to such a man as the Canon. And "all Florence" very decidedly included that notable citizen of it, the worthy Signor Giuseppe Marini.

And those were the days, it must be understood, when "all Florence" knew all Florence, and what all Florence was doing!—pleasant quiet days in the little Grand-Ducal city, now departed, never to return! For Florence, as all the world knows, is now a great metropolis, with a population not only much more than doubled, but in a great measure strangers in the land, and strangers to each other—all which makes the state of society in the "City of Flowers" much more like what it is in other large cities, and quite unlike the old order of things, when almost the whole of the inhabitants of the little town had been born under the shadow of Giotto's tower.

So that the gossips of the "Bottegone," who saw Signor Marini there night after night, knew well enough that he was not leaving the Signora Dorotea, his wife, to the dulness of a solitary evening. And if any of them had overheard, as he easily might have done, the words with which the *farmacista* closed his discussion with the handsome young man with the curly brown hair and large blue eyes, as above narrated, he would probably have known perfectly well to what the discussion had related.

And it is time that the reader should be made equally *au courant* of the subject in question, and of the state of matters connected with it.

## CHAPTER II.

"A CHANGED WORLD, MY MASTERS!"

THE handsome youngster with whom Signor Giuseppe Marini was talking was Signor Bartolommeo (shortly Meo) Varalla,

a young sculptor. And the subject of discussion between them had been nothing less than an outrageously audacious proposal on the part of the young artist, that he should be permitted to make Dianora Marini, the *farmacista*'s only daughter, his wife.

An audacious—indeed a monstrous—proposition, in truth ! For Meo Varalla was poorer than any church-mouse can be supposed to be in a country where there is such plenty of good candles on the altars and in the sacristies. Instead of seeking a place under government, at 8d. a day, rising to a sure competence of £32 a year in course of time, he had chosen to make himself an artist, and had—not till after some time spent in doubt upon the subject—at last determined to devote himself to sculpture. He had as yet done little—almost nothing—except the busts of a few patrons, who had been induced to patronise rising talent by the chance of getting their heads immortalised at a cost very little exceeding that of the marble ; and a few models of subjects in clay, which he never had been able to afford to put into marble, save one which had been commissioned by a shrewd English traveller, who had calculated that the day would probably come when the name of Bartolommeo Varalla would make the work he bought worth many times what he paid for it. This work—the statue of a young girl, with a palette and maulstick in her hand, standing before an easel and contemplating a small picture on it—had been exhibited, according to Florentine fashion, in the artist's studio for a few days before it was sent away to its destination, and had made a considerable impression on the public mind, and been much admired. But Meo was, none the less, still as poor as a Protestant church-mouse. And to think of his dreaming of marrying old Giuseppe Marini's daughter !

No wonder, indeed, that the well-to-do *farmacista* had declared that he would not promise to say "Yes" to such a demand, even in the case of the young sculptor's succeeding to the utmost extent of his sanguine hopes, while he declared

himself fully determined to say "No," if the hopes in question were not realised. The wonder was that his rejection of the young man's suit should not have been very much more decisive and peremptory.

As for Meo's audacity, the way he became guilty of it was in this wise. While still merely studying art in general, and feeling his way to that embodiment of it which was most in conformity with his own special gifts, Signor Marini had employed him to give lessons in drawing to his daughter Dianora. Nora had bothered his heart out about it; and it was always a great deal more difficult to him to say "No" to her than to say it to any other human being. It was her whim—her *beau idéal*—to study art! She would learn to draw! Why did not her parents find some steady-going, grey-headed married man for her teacher, since she must needs have one? Because steady-going, grey-headed masters would not have accepted such terms as poor church-mouse Meo was fain to be glad of. And Signor Marini had a frugal mind; and it never came into the pottering brain of the desiccated old druggist, that a church-mouse artist would dare to fall in love with Dianora Marini, his heiress!

But Dianora was beautiful as one of Beato Angelico's angels, and just the very girl, moreover, for an artist to fall in love with—full of poetry, and love of art, and romantic feeling herself! How could it be otherwise than that the young man should fall in love with her, though he had been in a more starved condition than ever church-mouse was? And how, when he did get his first solitary commission, could he avoid making his work the portrait of the mistress of his heart and soul, seeing that her face and form were never for an hour absent from his imagination? And how could Dianora avoid feeling, when she, like the rest of the world, went to see his completed work ere it was sent away, that never since maidens were first wooed and won, had a declaration of love been so charmingly, so beautifully, so irresistibly made? And how was it possible that she should avoid

being quite as desperately in love with Meo as Meo with her ?

Stupid old desiccated herbalist ! Just as if lad and lassos did not fall in love every day in the year on infinitely less provocation !

But surely it might have been expected that Dianora's lady mother, the Signora Dorotea, should have been more awake to the ways and tendencies of young hearts, than to have allowed her daughter to be exposed to such a danger ! The fact is, you see, that ladies whose thoughts are very much occupied with their own charms, and the effect produced by them, are rarely wont to be very accurate observers or vigilant custodians of those of their daughters. And then, moreover, the Signora Dorotea fully thought, that all matters pertaining to hearts, and love, and wedlock, and so forth, had been finally and definitively settled, and arranged, and done with in her daughter's case a couple of years before. For Nora was now eighteen, and at sixteen she had been engaged—as far, at least, as the purposes and intentions of her parents could engage her.

The state of the case was in this wise.

The property of the Signor Canonico Buti was situated at some distance from Florence, in the rich plain which lies around Pisa. Though small in extent, it produced much ; for the alluvial soils that the Arno, the Ombrone, and the Serchio have washed down from the Apennine in the course of ages, and spread out in what was once the bed of the Mediterranean, are as rich when smiling with golden maize as they were malarious and pestilential in their original condition of unreclaimed salt-water marshes.

But the Canon Buti's land was not extensive enough to require the employment of a *fattore*, or bailiff, for itself alone. So it was placed under the care of the *fattore* of a much larger neighbouring property—a certain Giovanni Berni, whose broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat, broad rosy face, and broader red waistcoat, were well known in the markets

of Florence, Pisa, Leghorn, Lucca, and Pistora. A very well-to-do man was Signor Giovanni Berni, the *fattore*—a rich man indeed, as *fattori* in Tuscany are very apt to become—the law of nature in this matter seeming to be that as the landowner gets poorer and poorer, the *fattore* generally gets richer and richer.

Now Giovanni Berni, the *fattore*, had a son, the destined heir to all the fortune that had been built up during the long years of careful and judicious administrations, which had resulted in transferring the wealth of the Pisan corn-lands from lazy, ignorant, careless landlords to his careful, industrious knowing self. And it had come to pass, that the Rev. Canon Buti had taken the opportunity his intercourse with the *fattore* afforded him, to propose and negotiate a marriage between young Simone Berni, the *fattore*'s son, and the Signorina Dianora Marini. And in essaying to bring about such a union the Canon had felt that he was doing a good turn to all the parties concerned. It was an eminently fitting and appropriate match. The rich agriculturist's only son would be just the husband for the rich druggist's only daughter. Money would be put to money in a quite comfortable and satisfactory way; and he, the Reverend match-maker, would have rendered an essential service to his near and dear friend the Signora Dorotea, and would certainly have established a fair claim to the gratitude of his *fattore*.

Nor, in making himself the medium of overture and negotiation in such an affair, did the worthy Canon in any degree quit the ordinary track of ecclesiastical practice and habits. Such match-making, never undertaken, it must be rightly understood, by the mundane and reprehensible means of bringing the young folks together, or giving any opportunity for such vanities and dangerous frivolities as flirting and love-making—Heaven forbid!—but entirely by means of looking-up suitable alliances, and proposing them to and negotiating them with parents or guardians: such match-making as this is in Italy an eminently ecclesiastical function. Every family

with any pretensions to respectability and standing is sure to have an intimate friend in some priest, who considers it his special province to advance the family interests in such ways.

It was quite in the proper and recognised order of things, therefore, when the Canon Buti opened to Farmer Berni his project of marrying young Simone to all the savings of the druggist's life of industry, and the negotiation had prospered. The match had seemed an eminently desirable one to all the parties concerned—save, indeed, to little Nora. But she was the last person whom any one of the high contracting powers would have dreamed of consulting in the matter! She was only sixteen—what should the child know of marrying or giving in marriage! And it was not intended that the union should take place immediately. Nora would have plenty of time to get used to the idea, and make up her mind to the destiny prepared for her. And the Marini family, in company with his reverence the Signor Canonico, had made a visit to the *fattore* at the time of the vintage; and a Panta-gruelian feast had been spread, at which the guests sate four hours; and the proposed bridegroom, got up in a style of blinding splendour, had been duly presented to the intended bride; and the Berni stores of house-linen, in sufficient quantities to have sufficed for half-a-dozen families for half-a-dozen generations, had been exhibited by the triumphant *fattoressa* Berni to the appreciative Signora Dorotea; and the Bernis had visited the Marinis in the Piazza del Duomo, and had partaken of the druggist's very much less abundant and expensive hospitality, and returned excellently well pleased with the thriving appearance of Signor Marini's business, and shrugging their shoulders at the comparative meagreness of their entertainment, with a "*Che vuole! Firenze non e la campagna!*"

So the matter appeared to be almost as good as settled, to the perfect satisfaction of everybody, with the exception of poor Nora, in whose heart and memory the traces of every

hour of those fatal drawing lessons were as legible as ever, and were unceasingly read over and re-read over by her in imagination. Ah, poor child! how she remembered every word awakening her intelligence, every eloquent look, every thrill of the all-too-consciously meeting hands, when the delicious but fearful feeling of awakening love had begun to substitute itself between them for friendly and admiring sympathy! How she remembered it all always, by day and by night; and how specially vivid the remembrance was, when Simone Berni stood before her, and uttered his clownish platitudes, spiced with a singularly nauseous flavour of third-rate city dandyism!

Simone Berni was a handsome young fellow, too, in his way: six feet in his stockings, and magnificently brilliant white, black, and red all about his head and face, and a curling black beard, that was the admiration of all the countryside. But all these advantages seemed to poor fancy-stricken Nora to render him absolutely loathsome to her. And she began, as the time went on, to contemplate the idea of closing her eyes for ever with Meo's arms round her, in an all-ending cloud of charcoal fumes, as infinitely preferable to the fate of becoming the wife of Simone Berni!

Italian girls never used to meddle with, or think of, pans of charcoal, let them be required to marry whom they might. True; but matters are changing rapidly—were changing rapidly, in those last days of the old Grand-Ducal rule—in these respects. New ideas were, somehow or other, spreading themselves infectiously among the rising generation. There were the elements of a new and changed moral sentiment in the air.

In the olden time all would have gone smoothly enough. Nora would have married the man chosen for her by her parents without dreaming of remonstrating; and in due course of time the man chosen by herself would have been her lover—her *cavaliere servante*.

But new revolutionary ideas had reached that pitch that



little Nora really thought that a pan of charcoal, with Meo's arms round her, would be far preferable to marrying any other man in all the world save him.

### CHAPTER III.

#### "MUCH VIRTUE IN AN IF."

SUCH being the circumstances of the case, it seems strange, on the first blush of the thing, that Signor Giuseppe Marini should not have replied to the representations of the young sculptor with a very much more decisive refusal than he did.

The fact was, that matters had become in some respects changed from what they had been at the time when Nora had been first engaged, or as good as engaged, to the son of the *fattore*. One change that had taken place was in respect to the somewhat bettered position of the young sculptor. And this brings us to the explanation of that reference of Signor Marini to the possibility of Meo's obtaining some commission.

"I won't promise to say 'Yes,' even if you get the job, and are as successful with it as you promise yourself," the druggist had said.

Now, the "job" alluded to was this.

One of the results of the social and moral stirring in the Italian atmosphere which has been spoken of, was a tendency to make political demonstrations out of the commemoration and glorification of those among the great ones of Italy's palmy days the story of whose lives involved any element of opposition to the then dominant tyrannies in Church and State. Statues were voted and erected to this and the other great name in several of the cities of Italy. And the sculptors at all events doubted not that this was the real and true method of regenerating the country.

Among other schemes of this sort, one was set on foot in

Florence for raising a statue to Galileo. It had been originated by a committee of a very strongly-marked Liberal political colour. Some money had been collected, and it was understood that young Meo Varalla was engaged on a model, and that if, as was likely, he should succeed in pleasing the leading members of the committee, he would, in all probability, be selected for the execution of the work. But when matters had been in that position, several persons began to bethink themselves that it was not well—perhaps even dangerous—to leave the putting-up of such a statue altogether in the hands of such thorough-going Radicals as those who formed the committee for the new Galileo memorial. Who knew what they might do—how they might compromise the country? It was a ticklish subject, Galileo might, as one sees, easily be treated in such a manner as to involve an open insult to the Church! A scroll with “*Eppur si muove*” on it; an arm upraised in denunciation; and, who knows, perhaps a three-cornered sacerdotal hat under the philosopher’s foot! A pretty sort of thing! And with that hot-headed, red-hot enthusiast Varalla at work on the model, you may swear it will be something of the sort!

There’s no objection to be made to a statue to Galileo. “*Anzi!*” Quite the reverse, if it is only done in a proper way; and the best way will be just to take the thing out of these fellows’ hands. We can very easily put together a much larger sum of money than they have been able to collect. Let us start an opposition committee, and put up a statue ourselves.

So an opposition committee sprang into existence, whose principal object was to insure that the proposed Galileo memorial should be intrusted to an artist who could be depended on to treat the subject in a manner that would not be offensive to good churchmen. And inasmuch as there is some subtle law of nature, which ordains that moderate order-loving politicians shall always be much more moneyed men than your enthusiastic idea-worshipping Radical, the oppo-

sition committee were soon able to advertise themselves as in command of a very much larger sum than that which the patrons of poor Meo Varalla had at their disposition. And thus it soon became pretty clear, that if anything was really to be accomplished in the way of erecting such a statue as had been proposed, it must be done by a fusion of the two committees. If the Radical committee abandoned the matter, the other party, having so far attained their object, would let the matter go to sleep, and nothing would be done. If the Radicals still strove to act independently, their opponents would certainly be able to prevent them from obtaining a sufficient amount of subscriptions; and in that case, also, the probability would be that nothing would be done. It was obvious, in short, that a fusion was the only plan. But if this policy were adopted, Meo Varalla's chance of obtaining the commission was very much lessened indeed. And it was *such* a chance for him!—his only chance it seemed to him. And it would be the making of him! And he had got the idea in his mind, and in his mind's eye. He knew that he should succeed, if only he could be allowed a fair trial. The work stood before him completed, in his dreams. It ousted even the vision of Dianora from some of his waking hours. The joy, the agony, the fever of creation was upon him! If only his Galileo could once fight its way into existence in the marble, he should be placed in a position in which he might fairly hope to win his Dianora for his own.

The truth was, however, that he never would have had the ghost of a chance of winning her, whether he got the commission for the "Galileo" or not, had other matters remained altogether as they had been at the time when the match between Dianora and the son of the *fattore* had first been proposed. But matters were not in the same position; and circumstances had occurred which had the effect of leading Signor Giuseppe Marini to think that it might be as well not to reject the son-in-law who so eagerly begged for that position too utterly and finally.

In fact, Signor Giuseppe Marini was not by a great deal so rich a man as he had been when the negotiation with the *fattore* had been opened. It was not so much that the business of the *farmacia* at the sign of "The Scales" had gradually fallen off of late years. This had been so, undeniably. There had come from "perfidious Albion" a man with English education, English energy, and English capital, who had taught the Florentines to want drugs of a very different quality, and to be served in a very different way, from what had contented them in the good old time. Signor Giuseppe Marini at the sign of "The Scales" was behind the times, and lost ground daily. But this was far from being the worst. Finding that the *farmacia* was bringing him little or nothing, Signor Marini had been induced to turn his attention to other things, in the hope of making up the deficiency. Speculation in mines was rife at that time in Tuscany. Very large fortunes had been made in one or two instances; and over a considerable extent of the hill-country of Tuscany indices of the presence of various minerals, especially copper, were not wanting. In an evil hour, Signor Marini had been induced to join one of the small associations which in those days were attempting a short-cut to fortune with little capital and no experience. The result had been losses very much heavier than any which the druggist had contemplated as at all on the cards when he entered into the speculation.

And, to make matters worse, Signor Giuseppe had shrunk from telling his wife any of these disastrous circumstances, which, as he well knew, would have been the same thing as taking his reverence the Canon Buti into his confidence. And that the druggist was very unwilling to do. In a word, poor Signor Marini was the victim of all those terrible annoyances and difficulties which arise from living with the reputation of being a much richer man than one really is!

And the consciousness of this led the druggist to modify his tone towards Signor Meo Varalla. It might well turn out

that Signor Meo might not be so undesirable a son-in-law, after all—nay, it might turn out that he was the only son-in-law available, so far as the future had as yet disclosed itself; for it was very much to be feared that Signor Giovanni Berni might be disposed to cry off, when he came to discover the real state of the case. Signor Giuseppe was well aware that the state of his affairs and fortune would be very closely looked into by the *fattore* and his son. And he had not the least doubt that if such investigation led to any notable disappointment, they would decline the hymeneal bargain, promptly and decisively, as they would decline to complete any other bargain under similar circumstances; whereas, on the other hand, this hot-headed romantic lad of a sculptor would jump for joy to take his girl without any assurance that he should ever get a sixpence with her.

Still, it would not do to give his Nora to a beggar. And really, if Meo should fail in getting this important commission for the “Galileo,” there was but faint prospect of his being anything else. Let him get *that*, and make a great success of it, and the whole aspect of the case was entirely altered. It was not only that there would be an important sum to start with, but the young sculptor’s name would be up. Commissions would come in in plenty; and the trade of a sculptor who has plenty of such is by no means a bad one. It is likely to be a far more lucrative one than even that of the most successful painter; for the latter can only, in these days at least, make money of the work of his own hands. He may conceive a hundred pictures; but if he could have orders for them all, his possibility of production is limited by the hours of slow patient toil which it is possible for him to devote to the putting of his thought on the canvas. It is not so with the sculptor. For him the mere drudgery of the work is done by others—much more, indeed, than what can fairly be so termed is done for him. He conceives the work, puts his creation into the plastic clay, and meaner hands do all or nearly all the rest.

Yes, if our friend Meo could get the commission for the "Galileo," and make a success of it, it might do—better even, perhaps, than a marriage with the rich *fattore's* son.

IF! Ay, *if*. All depended on that "if."

## CHAPTER IV.

### LOVERS' VOWS.

THE motives, then, which led Signor Marini to reply to the young sculptor's arguments in favour of his suit in the doubtful manner that has been seen, are clear enough. But all the difficulties with which the druggist had to contend, and all the obstacles which opposed themselves to Meo's hopes, have not yet been explained.

Although the reasons which have been stated had led Signor Marini to doubt very seriously whether it might not be best, after all, to give his daughter to Meo Varalla, La Signora Dorotea and her reverend friend the Canon Buti had no such doubts at all. They had in no degree wavered in their opinion that the match with Simone Berni was in all respects a most desirable one, and that the notion of giving Nora to a beggarly sculptor was utterly absurd, and not to be thought of. Of the many difficulties that were eating the poor druggist's heart out, and keeping him awake at night, and making him dread the moment when he should be called upon to manifest the state of his affairs to the shrewd and wealthy *fattore*, they knew nothing. Signor Marini had never found courage to tell any of these troubles to his wife.

And then, on the other hand, La Signora Dorotea and the Canon had strong reasons for disliking the match with the sculptor, which Nora's father did not share. He was simply anxious to make what he considered the best—that is the richest—marriage he could for his girl. Her mother and

the domestic Canon were also anxious that the best possible alliance should be secured for the druggist's heiress. They also were well inclined to consider that the richest husband was the best husband. And, knowing nothing of the difficulties there might be in the way of securing the *fattore's* son, and utterly discrediting the idea that poor Meo's art would ever lead him even to a comfortable competence, they thought it evident that there could be no comparison between the two suitors in that respect.

But there were other motives, also, which rendered La Signora Dorotea and the Canon warm partisans of the one, and uncompromising enemies of the other proposal. The Canon had himself been the proposer of the first, and had, in some sort, promised his friend the *fattore* a well-endowed and beautiful girl for a daughter-in-law. And this went for something. But it was not all! This troublesome sculptor was an out-and-out Liberal, infected with all the new-fangled notions, which were then giving so much trouble in quiet sleepy Tuscany, and were threatening to give so much more! To give the girl to him was well-nigh as bad as giving her over to perdition! Especially with her romantic turn of mind, fancying herself in love too with the fellow, and ready to make all his hair-brained notions her own, there would be no chance that she might reclaim him! It would be all the other way! It would be a falling-off of her and whatever children she might have to the enemy and the foul fiend! The Canon Buti was a thorough churchman, and the Signora Dorotea was a devotee; and such an alliance was not to be thought of!

What maggot Signor Giuseppe, poor man! could have got into his head, that he should latterly have appeared half inclined to prefer this Meo Varalla to such an exemplary young man as Simone Berni, they could not imagine! There was no knowing what stuff he got his head crammed with at the *café*, or who might get hold of him to earwig him! To think that he should have been weak enough to listen to a

parcel of trash about artistic glory and fame, and the thousands of lire that a poor starving artist was going to gain, all out of his own brain! *Misericordia!* A likely story.

One thing, however, was clear! Not even Signor Giuseppe, however much he may have been bitten by all such stuff and nonsense, could dream of accepting the artist as his son-in-law if he failed in obtaining this commission, which was to be the foundation of his fortunes. Failing that, he not only was, but was likely to remain, a beggar! If only it could be managed that he should not get the commission, it would be all safe; and honest Simone Berni, who in thought, word, and deed always gave the Church her due, would walk over the course.

Poor Meo little imagined that his love for Dianora would operate potently against his succeeding in that great object, on which all his future depended!

But in a Catholic country, with society constituted as it was—rather than is—in Italy, there is no saying where the limits to the influence which a priest can exert can be drawn. The mode in which that influence can be exerted is so secret, so much apart from all the ostensible circumstances that govern human affairs—and at the same time the solidarity of churchmen is so perfect, the mutual help to be rendered to each other, in the attaining any object, is so thoroughly understood and acted on—that any man, let his line of life be what it may, is almost hopelessly weighted in the race who has the ill will and the ill word of the priest.

Meo Varalla bid Signor Marini “good night,” after those last sibylline utterances of the worthy druggist, and left the café, while the old gentleman engaged in a game of dominoes with a neighbour. The druggist’s family lived on the second floor of the same house in which the farmacia at the sign of “The Scales” was situated—a large building on the Piazza del Duomo, so close to the enormous fabric of the church that it remained in deep shadow, while a large part of the church, and of the piazza around it, were bathed in the moonlight—



that Italian summer moonlight, which gives to the shadows all the blackness of the shadows at noonday !

Now, on quitting the café of the "Bottegone," Meo walked towards the Baptistry—in the opposite direction, that is, to that in which Signor Marini's house was situated. But when he had reached the western side of the Baptistry, he turned so as to walk round it, passed by the foot of Giotto's tower, and in the broad moonlight all along the southern side of the cathedral, round the congeries of domed chapels which form the eastern end of the building ; and so, coming round again to the north side of the church, approached the druggist's house. As he rounded the last towards the north of these chapels, he stopped within the shelter of a buttress, which cast a yet deeper shadow than that common to the whole northern side of the piazza, and looked up at an open window in the house opposite to him.

All the windows in all the houses were open, for this was the hour for cooling the rooms with the fresh night-air, after shutting out the heated atmosphere during all the hours of the sun's stay above the horizon.

Evidently Meo's coming had been waited for by the inhabitant of the chamber he was gazing at ; for there was an immediate movement of the muslin curtains which hung over the whole space of the window. They were cautiously and timidly held apart, just sufficiently to allow him to see a pale face framed in the opening between them. He clasped his hands together, raising them towards the vision, and then drawing them in, and forcing them on his own breast, executed a pantomime, which expressed, quite intelligibly to the eyes that were straining down to him through the deep shadow, the thought of the embrace thus figured. And there was doubtless some answering gesture not less significant : for Meo, with a look of rapture on his upturned face, gave a little spring forward, as if he would have cleared at a bound the distance that separated him from that form behind the curtain !

Then there were movements of the muslin, that seemed to indicate that the person ensconced behind the curtain was carefully peeping, first up the piazza and then down it. The moment was propitious; there was not a creature within sight, save Meo in the shadow of the opposite buttress. Quick from the corner of the window, scarcely visible as it descended along the dark wall of the house, descended a thread with a little something at the end of it. As soon as it was within reach from the ground, Meo, with an anxious glance in his turn, to assure himself that there was nobody on the piazza, darted across, seized a little black bag at the end of the thread, extracted from it a scrap of paper, and, quick as lightning, replaced it by another. The thread was again drawn up; and after one more exchange of ardent glances the prizes were carried off by the lovers, to be enjoyed in the nearest lamplight compatible with the needful privacy.

This is what Nora read :

“Treasure of my soul !” (it sounds a trifle *tall*, perhaps, in our homely tongue, but “*Tesoro dell' anima mia*” is pretty enough in the *dolce lingua* in which Nora read it,)—“Treasure of my soul !—

“What would I give to be where this happy bit of paper will be when you read it ! What I am most anxious to tell you, my own darling, among all the things that I burn to whisper in that dainty little pink ear, is that I almost fancy that your father is becoming less hostile to our wishes. Heaven grant that I am right in thinking so ! He declares that he will not say ‘No,’ if I should get the commission for my ‘Galileo.’” (It will be observed that this was not exactly what the druggist had said ; but the lover’s sanguine eagerness had so interpreted it.) “And if any trust is to be placed in what my friends on the committee tell me, I think I shall have it ! And, inspired as I am by you know what, and you know who, my sweetest darling, I do think that if I have this chance I shall make a success ! I confess that I

like what I have done. And oh ! what would I give to show it to you, and have your opinion and advice ! But this, I suppose, is impossible ! Perhaps, if you could get out with your father, it might not be impossible to persuade him to come to the studio, suggesting it, not beforehand, but on a sudden, when you are out. Think of this, my own, own treasure !

“ You are never absent from me in thought—never, never ! —not even when my model is before me !

“ Your own, own Meo ! ”

What Meo read was this :

“ DEAREST AND BEST !

“ I cannot tell you in what anxiety I live ! No word is said to me on the subject. Even the old persecutions, and threats, and exhortations, have all ceased for some time past. But I am sure that bodes no good. I think they fear the possibility of papa's relenting if you get the commission, and I am tormented with fear that something is going on with a view to frustrate this hope ! Is it in any way possible that *anybody here* should have the means of influencing the decision on this subject ? If so, for Heaven's sake, my Meo, be prudent !—be wary !—be vigilant ! Perhaps, being warned, you may be able to make any intrigues of the kind I dread of no avail. Meo, my beloved ! your poor Nora's life hangs on your finding the means of doing this ! Adieu, my own ! I have no fear of your beating down all opposition, if you are allowed a fair trial ; it is the underhand intrigues to prevent your having it that I fear ! God grant I may be over anxious !

“ Your own NORA ! ”

Nora had scribbled these lines in her own room, by the light of the gas-lamp in the street, a few minutes only before she had conveyed them to her lover in the manner that has been described. And at the very time she was engaged in doing so, on the other side of the wall that separated her chamber

from her mother's "saloncino," the secret web of the schemes she dreaded was being woven.

## CHAPTER V.

### "AMORE PACIFICO !"

IF Signor Marini's habitual absence from his home had not the effect of condemning his wife to solitary evenings, it caused his daughter to pass many such. For Nora knew, as surely as if an unerring instinct had taught it to her, that her presence in her mother's sitting-room—her "saloncino," as it was called, to avoid the pretentiousness of calling it a "salone"—was not desired or desirable when the Rev. Canon Buti was spending the evening with the Signora Dorotea ; and as this was the case nearly every evening, Nora passed many more hours in solitude than it was good for her to pass. Fortunately, Nora was, unlike the immense majority of her contemporaries, a reader. Her mother probably would have been much shocked had she known how much of her daughter's time was thus spent. The possibility of such a thing never entered her head ! She would doubtless have been more horrified still could she have known the nature of her daughter's studies ; and her anger and dismay would not have been diminished if the further fact had been disclosed to her, that the pestilent young artist, who had been employed to teach her to draw because he could be hired cheaply, was in truth the main director of her daughter's studies, and that her books were mostly, if not entirely, of his recommending. Nor would it probably have reassured her at all, if it had been made clear to her that there was nothing among them all which the most careful of English mothers would have objected to see in the hands of her girl. As it was, however, Nora pursued her studies among her books

and her pencils, interfered with only of late by long hours of reverie, which made her solitude very welcome to her.

In the "saloncino," meanwhile, on that evening on which Nora wrote her little letter to Meo, the Signora Dorotea and the Signor Canonico were sitting side by side on a sofa at the back of the room, while a little table prepared for supper stood near the open window. There was one of those tall Etruscan-shaped lamps, still peculiar to Tuscany, standing with two out of its three wicks burning on the table ; but the farther part of the room, where the two friends were sitting, was in deep shade.

"I am a little uneasy, *cara mia*," said the Canon, taking the lady's fat little hand, and kindly patting it as he spoke, "about one or two things that have dropped from Signor Giuseppe lately about Nora's marriage. I don't know what has come to Signor Giuseppe."

"Come to him ! *Poverino* ! what should come to him—except that he always hearkens to the last blockhead that has taken him by the button-hole ! Poor dear man ! he was always like that, and always will be," returned the lady.

"But, if we don't mind what we are about, we shall have trouble in the matter. He is capable of giving the child to that vagabond after all," said the priest.

"*O Dio buono ! Misericordia !* A fellow without the price of a crust of bread to bless himself ! It is not to be thought of," said the lady, with much vehemence of tongue, but not with a sufficient amount of agitation to make her either raise her shoulders from the comfortable nest they had hollowed for themselves in the cushions behind her, or withdraw her hand from the caressing action of her companion.

"Who is it that talks to him, do you think, down there ?" said the Canon, indicating the shop beneath them by a glance towards the floor as he spoke.

"What ! in the *farmacia* ? *Che* ! It is not there that the harm is done. That lad Pietro that you recommended is a very good boy ; and if anything had been said in the shop,

I should have heard of it. *Che! che!* But it's that blessed café! Who knows whom he sees or what he hears there?" said Signora Dorotea.

"Of course, as long as the fellow *is* a beggar it is all safe enough. Signor Giuseppe won't give his daughter to a beggar! But if the fellow gets this commission, he won't be a beggar any longer. What a piece of stupidity and ill-luck it is that the idea of the statue should have come into the pumpkin head of some fool! What need was there to trouble ourselves about a statue to Galileo. Such nonsense—and mischievous nonsense too!"

"Why, what can you expect, *caro*, in such times as these! I think the world is coming to an end, for my part. And the girl, too! To think of a daughter of mine wanting to throw herself away on a beggarly artist! Jesu Maria!"

"And my opinion is that she will have her way, too, if the fellow gets this unlucky commission. Ah! *cara mia*, Nora will never be what her mother was—and is—not if she were to live a thousand years!" said the Canon, with a tender look at the plump smooth face of the lady at his side.

"Does it seem so to you?" returned the lady, with a gratified simper. "But are not you one of those who will have to decide on the artist to be employed?" she added, smilingly.

"I am one of the committee—one of the second committee, *s' intende*, which was formed to prevent those Liberals from having the thing all their own way. I made myself one on purpose to have an opportunity of watching over Nora's welfare. And those other *caraglia* have no money among them, or very little. They cannot do the thing without us."

"*Ebbene?* Will it not be all right, then? You will give the job to somebody else. *Ecco tutto!*" said the lady.

"Yes; but that may not be so easy. The greatest number of those who have taken the matter up on our side, and who

form our committee, care mainly for the thing in an artistic point of view. They want to make sure that the statue shall not be an indecency—an open insult to the Church. But if that is guarded against, they will think only of getting the best statue for their money.”

“And is there any likelihood of this blessed Varalla producing the best statue?” asked the lady.

“Well, I am not sure that he may not. It is said that he has a real talent. I am not nearly so certain as I should like to be that he may not produce the best statue. But I have very great hope that he will treat the subject in some manner that will effectually prevent our friends from accepting his work. He is sure to introduce some offensive allusion or other. The subject, between ourselves, lends itself so well to that sort of thing. In short,

See, *cara*, whether I am not always thinking of your interests, which, in truth, are dearer to me than anything else, as they ought to be.

I have found the means of having a mode of treating the matter suggested to him, which would infallibly exclude his model from all consideration on the part of the respectable committee. A suggestion from a quarter that he is sure not to suspect, and that, on the contrary, will have the greatest weight with him! His old master—the man in whose studio he worked before he took a studio of his own. It was a master-thought!—an inspiration! *Ecco!* This master of his, Biraggini, is a cousin of                      well, never mind!                      of a very particular friend of mine. And Biraggini has been given to understand that if this young scamp’s model is conceived in such-and-such a manner, the probability is that he himself may get the commission. Of course it is impossible that older men in the profession should like to see such a commission given to a lad young enough to be the son of any one of them. And Biraggini is a discreet man—a pious man, which unhappily very few of our artists are in these days! He is not likely to disregard a hint from                      the person I have em-

ployed to speak to him ; and I think Signor Meo is not likely to disregard his advice ; and if that be so, and all goes well, we are all right ! ”

“ *Caro Virgilio !* ” (Virgilio was the Canon Buti’s name) “ what should I do without you ! Truly you are our providence ! *Una vera benedizione di Dio !* Would it be well, think you, that I should offer a light of seven candles at the altar of Our Blessed Lady in the chapel of the Duomo, with the intention of obtaining the grace that good Signor Biragginì should get the commission ? ”

“ It is, in any case, a pious thought, *cara mia !* Yes—I would make the offering you speak of. The favour of Our Blessed Lady cannot be otherwise than desirable ! ” said the Canon, with unctuous gravity.

“ *Diamine !* ” said the lady.

The word—a very favourite one in a Tuscan mouth—is not an easily translatable one. The meaning is something to the effect of, “ I should think so, indeed ! ” “ Of course, there can be no doubt about that ! ”

A few days after the date of this conversation between the Canon and the Signora Dorotea, the druggist received a very business-like letter from Signor Giovanni Berni, the *fattore*, saying that, as the time was now drawing near when it would be well to think of carrying into execution the scheme for an alliance between their children which had been projected, if it were to be carried out at all, he (the *fattore*) would, with Signor Marini’s permission, give instructions to his lawyer, the Signor Dottore Aguti, to wait on Signor Marini for the purpose of learning from him the particulars of the Signorina Dianora’s *dote* and expectations.

This letter fell like a clap of thunder on the poor druggist. No possible proposal could be less welcome to him than that a lawyer should be sent to question him just then about his financial condition and the state of his affairs. He would have given much to avoid such an *exposé* ; and he was very sure that if any such examination were instituted just at that



moment, no marriage between his daughter and young Simone Berni would result from it.

If he could manage to keep matters in suspense yet a little longer! If only he could manage to wait, and see the upshot of this affair of the commission for the "Galileo!" For Signor Marini's mind, tossed from one difficulty to another, had, though not quite avowedly to himself, in fact reached the conviction that, *if* Meo Varalla should get the commission, he could not do better than give his daughter to him. It is true he lived in no small fear of the Signora Dorotea and her reverend friend and counsellor. But what could he do? Which was the better—to have to confess to that terrible tribunal that he was a ruined man, or not very far from being such—or to assert his will and pleasure to dispose of his daughter to the sculptor? Then a part of the blame of this latter course might be cast on Nora herself. There would be the excuse, as far as it went, of the difficulty and disagreeableness of compelling her to marry against her will. No doubt she was wilfully determined not to marry Signor Simone, and almost equally perversely minded to marry the sculptor. All that Signor Marini now admitted was, that he shrunk from forcibly constraining her inclinations. He knew, indeed, that such an excuse would not be worth much in the eyes of the Signora Dorotea and the Canon; but it was much to have at least something to say.

The consequence of these meditations on the part of Signor Marini was, that a certain increased degree of intercourse took place between the father and the daughter; and the result again of this was, that on one Saturday night, when (as had grown to be with the lovers their nightly custom) the thread with the little black bag at the end of it was let down from Dianora's chamber-window, and was eagerly seized by the figure watching for it, spinging out of the deep shadow of the cathedral buttress—the treasure of written scrap which it contained was read by Meo, with beating heart and glistening eyes, as follows:

"Do not fail to be at the studio all the afternoon to-morrow, dearest! I am to go out with papa, and I have some hope of getting him to go to the studio to see your model. You must not be disappointed, my own Meo, if we do not come; for I cannot promise. But I think you will feel sure that if *we* are disappointed, it will not have been the fault of your own, ever your own,

"NORA."

## CHAPTER VI.

### A VISIT TO THE STUDIO.

It was not the custom of the Signora Dorotea to take her daughter with her to mass on a Sunday morning. Of course it is not to be supposed for a moment that Nora was constrained or permitted to neglect her religious duties; but there are fitnesses of times, and places, and persons. It was not good for the Signora Dorotea—at least so she said, and said that her medical adviser said—to be very matutinal in her habits. And then an early morning mass! It is all over in twenty minutes! One sees nobody—at least nobody to speak of! The Signora Dorotea had, all her life, laid to heart the precept which bade her let her light shine before men. She liked also that it should shine before women, especially of that sort which frequents the fashionable church of the Santissimo Annunziata at the eleven-o'clock mass. And then there was a certain feeling at the bottom of the Signora Dorotea's heart, which gave her the constant consciousness that a handsome well-preserved woman nearly approaching her fortieth year was apt not to shine before men so brightly as she might otherwise shine if she had a far more beautiful daughter of eighteen, or thereabouts, by her side. And then, again, it was in every point of view proper that young folks should be matutinal. An early mass in the Lady Chapel behind the

choir of the neighbouring cathedral was in every respect the proper thing for Nora, as evidently as the High Mass at the Annunziata at eleven was the proper thing for her lady mother.

So Nora always went, accompanied by an old woman, who had lived with the Marini ever since she was born, to mass at the cathedral at 7 A.M. There were very few people in the vast church at that hour—only a dozen or so of grey-bearded gaffers, and as many old crones. Not much for one's light to shine before! Nevertheless, it did so happen the fact was, to tell the whole truth, that one day, when Meo had been speaking to Nora of Michael Angelo's magnificent but unfinished work, the "*Pietà*," at the back of the High Altar in the cathedral, little Nora—blushing scarlet in the most unaccountable manner as she spoke—told him that she knew that grand work better than any other piece of sculpture in all Florence, inasmuch as she passed before it every Sunday morning in going to mass in the Lady Chapel.

"And," said Nora, dropping her eyes to the ground, beneath their long lashes, "I see it in the best possible light when the morning sun is streaming in at the eastern windows; for old Lucia and I go to the seven-o'clock mass in the chapel of the Madonna every Sunday morning."

What there could have been in such a statement to call up so bright a blush in Nora's cheeks it is hard to say. Certain it is, however, that her heart did beat in an unusual manner as she and old Lucia entered the church on the next Sunday morning, and undeniable that her eyes did for a minute or two—only for a minute or two—wander round the building in a manner that was not usual with her; and down went the eyes, with a jerk, as one may say, and were glued to her prayer-book, and that same unaccountable blush came back again more violently than ever! The old priest who performed the mass must have been, Nora thought, in a great hurry for his breakfast, for it seemed to her that the service was shorter than it had ever been before. She kept her

eyes constantly bent down towards her book all the time; but anybody who could have seen the movements of them under the drooping lashes, would have fancied that their mistress was forgetting the direction in which the altar was, and mistaking for it the huge many-shafted column which stands at the entrance of the Lady Chapel!

And, in fact, as Nora and her attendant were quitting the church, just as they were passing by this same column, and while old Lucia was very deliberately helping herself to holy water, and turning to make a reverence to the altar, a hand came out from behind the pillar, and grasped the little hand—that somehow or other happened to be held out a little loosely from the side in that direction—in a manner that not only caused that brilliant blush to come over her again worse than ever, but sent the blood tingling through every vein in her body in a way that made her feel, as she stepped across the Piazza del Duomo to her father's door, as if she did not know whether she was standing on her feet or on her head.

And thenceforward it had come to pass that every Sunday morning, unfailingly, the same hand had gone through the same performance at the same moment.

And sometimes, latterly, it had happened that certain scraps of written paper had been exchanged during that regularly-returning hand-clasp. And on the Sunday morning of which we are now speaking, when Meo had carried off the treasure thus gained, he found the words written: "Be sure to be at the studio! I think we shall come.—Your own NORA."

How, when, and where Signor Marini went to mass, nobody ever asked, and his family never knew. But he was always at home, like a good domestic man, for the early family dinner, at which the Rev. Canon Buti was on the Sunday an almost invariable guest. And after dinner, on the occasion in question, the druggist signified that he was ready to perform his promise of going out with Nora. It was a mere formal compliment to ask his wife if she would join

them. The Signora Dorotea was not much given to walking ; and very much preferred being left to a little quiet chat, and perhaps a game of cards, with the Canon.

Signor Marini and his daughter, stepping out of the house on to the Piazza, turned naturally for their walk towards the Cascine. They thus crossed the Piazza Santa Maria Novella, and took the Via della Scala, which leads to the Porta à Prato. Now, Meo Varalla's studio was in the Via della Scala. All which circumstances Nora had gone over and over again in her mind when planning her little scheme.

"You said the other day, papa, that you should like to see Signor Varalla's model for his statue of Galileo. Why should not we go and look at it now, as we are passing by?"

"Eh? Well, yes! I want to see it. It seems to me as if he is likely enough not to get the commission, after all. And if he don't, you know, it is of no use at all, you see, Nora! Of course not, eh? You understand that! But what's the good of going on Sunday? He won't be there on a *festa*."

"I daresay he will be in his studio, papa—he is so industrious! And his heart must be so full of his model. At all events we can but try, as we pass by."

And so Nora got her father to tap with his stick at the bell-less yellow door, on which was written, in black ink, "Studio di Bartolommeo Varalla."

A sculptor's studio is not so picturesque a place—if one may say so without a platitude—as that of a painter. There are none of the quaint odds-and-ends of colour-making objects—bits of tapestry, fragments of rich ancient stuffs, specimens of antique weapons and armour, a piece or two of old-world furniture, one or two articles of harmoniously-coloured porcelain or Venice glass, and the like—which so frequently make the confusion of a painter's studio so picturesquely suggestive.

A few blocks of marble in the rough; a number of doubtless very artistic but not very pleasing-looking casts of limbs and hands and feet hanging up on nails in the wall; some

sloppy-looking red earthenware basins full of muddy water ; a few lumps of yellow sticky clay, two or three models in progress, looking ghastly under the towels and cloths with which they are covered to keep them moist, or hidden beneath huge cylindrical cases made of paper and wire : all these objects make up a furnishing for the work-place of the sculptor much less attractive to the visitor than that which surrounds the student of the sister art.

A sculptor's studio generally consists of a suite of rooms. In those nearer to the entrance his workmen complete the translating of the master's thought into marble. In the last room, reached after the others have been passed through, is the artist's sanctum. There the clay grows into form in obedience to his conception ; and the model is elaborated, to which only such visitors are admitted as the artist delights to honour, or deems capable of appreciating his work.

Signor Marini and his daughter were not kept long at Meco's door, as may be imagined. This visit was a great point for Meo. In the first place, there was the infinite delight, the delight of the artist as well as that of the man, in showing his work—the work of which he was proud, and of which he knew that she would be proud—to the girl he loved. But it was very important to him that Signor Marini should have come to visit his studio. He knew very well that mere artistic interest in his model would not have brought the druggist to his studio. Nor did he expect to gather from the opinion of Signor Marini any useful hint as to the probability of his work being accepted by the committee. But that Nora's father should have thought it worth his while to come to his studio, and to have brought his daughter with him, was a proof that the druggist was at least contemplating the possibility that the success of the work might be important to her and to himself.

He drew up the covering, which hung from a little pulley fixed in the ceiling over the model, and stepped back to watch the effect it should produce on Dianora.

At the first sight of it she turned perfectly pale, and then flushed all over her face and forehead. She clasped her hands together, and remained for some minutes quite speechless.

"Oh, papa," she cried at last—with a catching breath and a heaving bosom, as she put out her hand to take her father's—"is it not grand? Is it not a noble statue? They cannot refuse it!"

Meo stole up to her side, and got her other hand. The acceptance of his statue by the committee could give him, at all events for the moment, no such delight as he felt at reading in Nora's face, unmistakably, the effect his work produced on her.

"Yes—it is doubtless a fine statue. I make you my compliments on it, Signor Meo. I really think that it is a very fine statue," said the druggist, with all his eyes on the statue; while Meo was all but kneeling on the other side of Nora, and covering her hand with kisses.

"I think the presentation of the man, as I see it in my imagination, is what it ought to be. I do not know if I have been able to embody my thought. I have tried hard, and have done my best," said Meo.

"It moves me more than any statue I ever saw. If it is possible for a face to express all that would be in the mind of such a man, when looking up to heaven, you have made that face express it, Signor Meo."

"Ah, Nora! come what will, nothing can rob me of the reward for all my toil, which you have now given me," cried Meo, rapturously, and absolutely forgetting the presence of Signor Marini.

"But what the committee may say to it we cannot tell," remarked the druggist, in a rapture-dispelling tone.

"Alas! no! And . . . have you heard, Signor Marini? . . . the committee have received an offer to execute the statue for nothing. It is very hard! My own old master too!—to think that he should be so anxious to

keep me down ! I cannot tell you how that has hurt me. It has cut me to the heart. They know that I cannot afford to execute the statue for nothing."

"When is the decision to be made known?" asked Marini.

"Very soon—in a day or two. It was decided last night that it should be left to the judgment of one single person," said Meo.

"O Dio ! Who—who is it?" exclaimed Nora, turning very pale.

"A true artist, and a real judge," replied Meo. "It is Signor Bracciale of Rome. He is very old now, and it is long since he has worked ; but for many years he was allowed to be the first sculptor in Italy. He happens to be coming here ; and when the committee heard it, they resolved to settle all disputes by leaving the decision to him, and taking as definitive his opinion."

"But that is good news, Signor Meo, is it not ? If he is a real and great artist, we are safe," said Nora, forgetting in her emotion all that the use of the plural pronoun implied.

"I hope that it is good news for me," Meo said aloud ; adding, in a whisper in her ear, "Is it good news for you, too, dearest darling ? Certainly," he went on aloud, "Signor Bracciale can have no prejudice against me. I must think that if my statue deserves to be accepted, it will be accepted."

"Then I am sure that it will be accepted—sure of it ! But if Signor Bracciale has no prejudice against you, Signor Meo, he may have a prejudice in favour of Signor Biraggini ! Oh, is it not too bad—is it not base of Signor Biraggini, papa ?" said Nora, panting with eagerness and emotion.

"Well, of course everybody thinks first of himself, *cara mia ! Che vuoi ?* Naturally, Biraggini does not wish to be cut out," said the druggist.

"But he *will* be cut out !—and it will serve him right ! I hate him ! You have no reason for thinking, Signor Meo—



have you ?—that this Signor Bracciale is prejudiced in favour of that odious man ? ” said Nora, looking into her lover’s face with eager eyes.

“ I suppose they must have been friends. Signor Biraggini is only a few years younger than Bracciale ; they must have known each other ; and Biraggini has a great name. But everybody speaks very highly of Signor Bracciale : they say that he is before all else an artist, and thoroughly a *galantuomo*. They tell me that if he thinks my statue worthy of acceptance, nothing will prevent his saying so,” said Meo.

“ And his decision is to be final ? ”

“ So it was resolved last night.”

“ And he is to be here very soon ? ”

“ He arrives from Rome to-morrow. The day after to-morrow, in all probability, all will be decided,” said Meo, wistfully.

“ Well, my opinion is that it is a good statue,” said the druggist again. “ I hope you may be successful, Signor Meo. And if you are,” he added—with a significant look, as he gave the young artist his hand, preparatory to quitting the studio—“ why, we will have another talk upon that matter you were speaking of at the ‘ Bottegone ’ the other night.”

## CHAPTER VII.

### BETWEEN DINNER AND SIESTA.

No game of cards was played in the Signora Dorotea’s “ salottino ” on the second-floor over the “ Farmacio alle libra ” on that Sunday afternoon, for the time was occupied by the druggist’s wife and her reverend friend and counsellor in more interesting conversation.

As soon as Nora and her father had left the house, the Canon, taking a seat on the little sofa by the lady’s side, entered at once upon the subject, the discussion of which he had waited that moment to begin.

"I have something to tell you, *cara mia*, which I don't above half like. Signor Giuseppe has written to Berni's lawyer, in reply to an invitation from the latter to come to a definitive arrangement respecting Nora's marriage, putting him off in a manner which makes me very strongly suspect that he has other ideas in his head. He and Nora have had more talk together lately than quite pleases me ; and, if we don't mind what we are about, he will give the girl to that sculptor after all !—that is, supposing him to get the commission for the 'Galileo.' "

" *O poverino* ! what fly can have bitten him, to put such an absurdity into his poor head ? But then that animal of a Meo won't get the commission—that's one comfort ! Bah ! I've no patience with such folly ! " said the lady, very inclined to be cross at being bothered just at that moment by talk on an unpleasant subject, instead of having her usual game of cards.

" But that is just the point on which I was going to speak, *cara mia* ! I don't feel at all sure that he will not get the commission—that's the mischief of it. A plague on the statue to Galileo—a statue to a fellow who at the best was a heretic ! *Misericordia* ! what times we live in ! "

" But I thought, *caro*, that you had arranged matters so that the statue, at all events, would not be done by him ? " said the Signora Dorotea, with a strong faith in the omnipotence of her ecclesiastical friend.

" I have done all that was possible. The committee are as headstrong as mules ! I have got them an offer to have the statue made for nothing, and—would you believe such stupidity !—they make an objection to the trouble there would be in returning all the subscriptions ! And now, last night, despite all that I and one or two friends could say against it, they have come to a determination to leave the decision of the matter absolutely to a Signor Bracciale, who is expected here from Rome to-morrow. "

" Santa Maria ! And who is this Signor Bracciale, pray ? " asked the lady, opening wide her large black eyes.

"Bracciale is himself a sculptor, who has lived most of his life at Rome. He is quite an old man, who has for some time past given up work himself; but some years ago he had the reputation of being the first sculptor in Italy."

"And they have determined to do just what he tells them in the matter? *Misericordia!* what stupid things men are!" exclaimed Signora Dorotea, lifting her hands, eyes, and shoulders.

"Stupid enough! However, that is what they have resolved to do," returned the Canon.

"And what will this 'forestiere' from Rome tell them?"

"Aye, that is the question."

"But, Signor Canonico, you always know what everybody is likely to say or to do."

"Not always. I had never thought, for instance, that Signor Giuseppe would have dreamed of listening to this pestilent fellow as a suitor for his daughter!"

"Ah, Giuseppe, *povera anima!* Certainly, there's no counting on what folly he may take into his head. But as to this Signor Bra—Brac—this Roman man?"

"Well, I am not without hope. If I could see the Signor Varalla's model—if I knew how he had treated the subject—I should be better able to form an opinion. Signor Bracciale has always been a religious man—has always stood well with the Church and at Rome, you know. If the model has anything offensive to the Church in the way it is treated, we may depend on Bracciale to condemn it, let its other merits be what they may. That is our best chance!"

"But is there no other way of—of—giving Signor Bracciale a hint—you know? A foreigner! What does he know? Of course it is necessary that he should be made to understand who is who, and what is what, here in Florence."

"*Lasci fare a me!* Leave me alone to think of all that. Of course, I shall take care that proper representations are made to him. But, you see, the man is a sculptor. These artists are the devil! They are so apt to think that their art

is the most important thing in the world. If there is nothing to be said against Varalla's statue on the score of religion, and if he thinks it otherwise good, I am very much afraid he may speak in favour of it. Biraggini was an old friend of his—that is one point in our favour. And I shall take care that it is well represented to him what a slap in the face he will be giving him, if he decides in favour of this upstart's work ! ”

“ *Bravo, caro mio !* An old man is surely not likely to prefer a boy's work to that of an old friend of his own, and of his own time,” said the Signora Dorotea, shrewdly.

“ I should hope not ; but I don't know. Signor Bracciale is said to be a very popular man with the young artists in Rome—a patron of rising talent, and all that sort of nonsense. But he will be severe as to the meaning and tendency of the statue—that is our best hope.”

“ And you say it is likely enough that this impious fellow should have put some wicked meaning into his statue, eh ? ”

“ Well, yes ; I think it very likely, most likely, that he has treated it in some way that would be justly offensive to good churchmen. If he has only taken any of the hints, as to the conception of the subject, which I took care to have suggested to him, we are safe enough.”

“ *Ahi me !* what a troublesome world it is ! And what a thing it is for a poor woman to have a husband with so poor a head as that *poverino* Giuseppe ! What in the world should I do, *caro*, without your friendship ? ” sighed the Signora Dorotea, with a languishing look at the portly Canon by her side.

“ You know, *cara*, that your interests are mine. I only hope that I may be able to bring this matter to a favourable ending. But I confess I am not easy about it,” replied the Canon.

“ And when is this Signor—what is his name ?—this *Romano*, to see the model Meo Varalla has made ? ”

“ Probably on Tuesday. Signor Varalla has been informed

by the committee—by our committee, that is—that if they should be so advised by Signor Bracciale, they will make no further opposition to intrusting the work to him. I wish I could see the model the man has made—I should know better what to think about it then,” added the Canon, after a pause.

“And you really think that, if the young fellow gets the commission, Signor Giuseppe will be fool enough to give our daughter to him?” said Signora Dorotea, pressing her lips, and nodding her head up and down.

“I am very much afraid so.”

“*Ahi me!* Such folly makes me sick. I wish all the statues and all the sculptors were at the bottom of the Red Sea, for my part!”

“*Cara mio!*” returned the Canon Buti, taking her fat little hand, and patting it between both his, “there would be small harm done if they were so. But don’t vex yourself till you get a nervous attack, my poor friend. Let us hope for the best.”

And then, to avoid the chance of a nervous attack, the lady arranged herself comfortably in her corner of the sofa, and soon fell into a comfortable after-dinner doze, while the Canon very shortly afterwards imitated her example in his corner of the sofa.

Some hours later, when the farmacia was closed for the night, and the druggist’s family had gone to their chambers, the thread with the little bag at the end of it came quivering down from Nora’s window; a figure started out from the shade of the buttress on the other side of the way, and quickly taking from the little receptacle the paper it contained, replaced it by another, which the watcher above lost no time in possessing herself of.

In it she read as follows:—

“It has been settled, my own best and dearest! that the Signor Professor Bracciale is to come to the studio on Tues-

day. Think of the hours of anxiety till then ! If he approves, all will, I trust, go well ; if he frowns, all will be lost. Pray for me, my sweet Nora ! I know that these hours will be terrible to you too, my own one ! Would it be possible

See now ! Tuesday is a *festa*. Would it be possible, do you think, to induce your father to come with you to the studio at the hour when the Professor will be there ? It would be all the more terrible, it is true, if the Professor's opinion is against me. But if he praises—don't think me too conceited, my treasure ; I speak to you as to my own soul—if he praises, it may have an effect on your father favourable to our wishes. May God in heaven grant it ! The Professor will be at the studio at three o'clock. If you *could* be there a little before . . . .

“Your own MEO.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE DECISION.

THE state of anxiety in which Nora and Meo passed the hours that intervened between that Sunday night and the Tuesday afternoon following may be readily imagined. Nora had within the last week or two been more with her father, as the Rev. Canon Buti had remarked, than had been usual in the druggist's family. And this intercourse, though nothing positive had passed between her father and herself on the subject, had led Nora to feel tolerably sure that her father would make no further opposition to her marriage with the sculptor, *if* he should be successful in obtaining the commission for the “Galileo.” For Nora, therefore, *everything* depended on the issue of the judgment to be pronounced on the Tuesday.

For Meo the decision would involve, as far as it was possible to see into the future, the “To be or not to be” of his

whole career and life. His love and his artistic success were equally at stake.

Signor Giuseppe also had, on his part, become not a little interested in the upshot of the Roman sculptor's opinion. It was important to him to avoid that examination into his affairs which would necessarily result from his professing any longer to entertain the notion of an alliance between his daughter and the son of *fattore* Berni. Nobody knew better than the old druggist that when the affairs of a trader and speculator have gone somewhat to the bad, the best chance for the restoration of them, if there be any such chance, must lie in the concealment of the fact that there is anything amiss with them. Then, putting aside such considerations, it would have been extremely disagreeable to him to have to avow to his wife and to the Canon Buti—(in his thoughts upon the subject, he assumed, as the most natural fact in the world, that to tell anything to one of these persons was to tell it to both)—that he was, at all events for the present, unable to provide such a dowry for his daughter as the Bernis had been led to expect, and would insist upon. It was far better and easier to assume the *sic volo sic jubeo* of domestic autocracy, and say that it was his will and pleasure to marry his daughter to Meo Varalla, the successful sculptor. And Meo, as he very well knew, would be overjoyed to take her without any further expectations than such as might arise from the contingencies of her father's ability and goodwill. Signor Giuseppe found himself in a position of difficulty and embarrassment, and the easiest, directest, and most satisfactory way out of it would be a marriage between Nora and Meo.

La Signora Dorotea and her friend and coadjutor the Canon were also, as has partly been seen by the conversation between them recorded in the last chapter, not a little anxious on the same subject. It had become pretty clear to them, also, that the druggist was coming to the determination to give Nora to Signor Varalla, if, by the obtaining of this important commission, he should be placed fairly on the way of

success in his profession. And this was on many accounts very distasteful both to the lady and her reverend friend. La Signora Dorotea very strongly objected to the artist, because he *was* an artist, and—what was nearly the same thing—a Liberal; and, most of all, a poor artist. She objected very strongly also, because she *had* objected—because she had said that no such marriage should be. Finally, she very much objected because the Rev. Canon Buti did not approve it.

The Canon for his part, besides these reasons, which he shared with Signora Dorotea, had others of his own. The proposed match with the Bernis was of *his* projecting. *He* had promised young Simone Berni a rich wife. He was anxious to please the *fattore*, and to stand in the light of a benefactor to him, for reasons of his own. And it was excessively disagreeable to him that all these plans and purposes should be brought to nought by the silly love-fancies of a disobedient girl. He had accordingly done everything in his power to secure the result he desired. It had been duly whispered in the ear of Signor Bracciale that this Varalla was a *mauvais sujet*—the last man to whom a work, in which the interests of religion and of the Church might be compromised, ought to be intrusted; that all the right-thinking part of the community were averse to his being chosen for the work; that the Signor Professor Biraggini was willing to undertake it for the mere honour of the thing; and that, though it was true he had not yet made any model, it would be quite safe to leave the work in such hands as his. To all which old Signor Bracciale had listened, nodding his head gravely as he did so. But the only word that could he got from him was, “We must see what the young man has done!”

Signor Giuseppe Marini had become so much interested in the issue of the matter himself, that Nora had found no great difficulty, inasmuch as the Tuesday was a *festa*, in persuading her father to take her that afternoon, as Meo had suggested, to the studio in the Via della Scala. When the time came for starting on the expedition, she felt desperately afraid of it



and almost repented having undertaken it. What—*what* should she do if the verdict were an adverse one? It was not to be expected that the judge would in that case forthwith and openly speak his condemnation. But Nora felt sure that she should know, without any spoken word, what his spoken opinion would be. But Meo wished her to be there—expected her. And, since it was in her power to do as he wished her, she would not for worlds shrink from the ordeal.

Accordingly, at a little before three, Signor Giuseppe and Nora knocked at the door of the studio. They found the artist alone. Being a *festa*, there were no workmen in the outer rooms. Meo opened the door to his visitors himself. He was in a state of feverish agitation and restlessness pitiable to see. There was the model in his little sanctum on its pedestal, with an extemporised background of green baize stretched behind it. The huge paper-blinds, with which the little room was furnished after the fashion of such places, had been arranged in such a manner as to throw the lights and shades in the most favourable manner, according to the artist's conception of his work. Again and again he kept turning the statue on its movable pedestal, and modifying the arrangement of the light a little this way and a little that. Then he would sit down on the little old well-worn sofa before it, and then in the next instant jump up to re-arrange the position with reference to the light.

"Well, my opinion is that it is a good statue!" said the druggist sententiously, as he stood with his hands behind his back gazing at it.

"Good! It is glorious!—it is sublime! If the man is not blind, he must admire it. He must see that it is one of the finest modern works he has ever seen. It must be successful!" cried Nora, enthusiastically.

"I think it seems to satisfy me less than it did. I see faults in it I did not see before—things that I know I could improve," said poor Meo, nervously.

"Where shall we go when he comes, Signor Meo?" said

Nora. "I don't think I can bear being here to watch his face as he examines it. I could not stand it. Besides, perhaps he would not like it. He would feel a sort of *soggezzione*."

"When he knocks at the door you can go in here, if Signor Giuseppe will excuse having to wait in such a corner. See—there is a large window-recess, which would never have been there if this had been built for a studio, and which I have shut out by my green curtain. You will hear what he says, though I don't suppose he'll say much, and you can come out as soon as he is gone. He won't be long, I take it."

And then, after a minute or two more, a knock was heard at the door. The Professor was very punctual to his appointment. Meo's heart gave a great bound, and he turned as pale as a sheet as the knock made them all jump. Nora and he interchanged one look—a bright and reassuring one on Nora's part—and one close and strong grasp of the hand; and then the druggist and his daughter stepped behind the green baize screen.

It was a great relief to Meo to find, on opening the door, that the Professor had had the delicacy of feeling to come alone. He bowed to him, and attempted to say a few words; but the sounds died upon his lips, and he led his visitor in silence to the inner room, and with a simple gesture of his hand towards the model stepped back, to leave his judge free to move round the statue in every direction.

The watchfulness of Meo's eye, as it scanned the old sculptor's face, may he imagined. But he could read nothing there. He could only mark that the old man kept his lips firmly pressed together. He stood before the statue with his back and shoulders bent forwards, his chin a little raised, and his forehead contracted into vertical wrinkles by the intentness of his gaze. He said no word; but when Meo was about to turn the statue on its pedestal, he arrested him by putting his hand on his sleeve, indicating his wish that the pose should not be altered.

And this continued for several minutes in profound silence, till it seemed to both the beating hearts in front of the screen and behind it that they could endure no more.

At last the Professor suddenly put out his hand and grasped that of the young sculptor.

"*Figlia mio!* I congratulate you!" he said. "It is a noble statue. At your age I had never done anything half so good."

"Oh, Signor Professore! . . . You think, then, that I may hope that it will be accepted by the committee?"

"*Diamine!* Accepted! If they are not both blind and mad, they will jump at it. Where, I should like to know, are they going to get anything half as good? The conception is thoroughly poetic, and the execution admirable."

"Signor Professore, you are breathing life into me!" said poor Meo, with the tears in his eyes, as his colour went and came. "And you do not see anything in it that—anything that can offend certain susceptibilities"

"*No! Davvero!* Ah, I forgot, in looking at the statue. Yes, they told me that your work would probably be conceived in an offensive spirit. *Che!* All stuff and nonsense! Our Holy Father might approve that model . . . would approve it with all his heart, I know, if he could see it."

Just at that moment the old Professor was startled, and a sudden flush of blood rushed all over Meo's face; for from behind the green baize screen at the back of the statue a sudden sharp cry was heard, and then violent hysteric laughter mixed with alternations of sobbing. And then in the next moment the head of Signor Giuseppe was pushed out, with an entreaty for a glass of water, and an open window for his daughter!

Meo dashed in behind the screen, and, bringing out the half-unconscious form of Nora, placed her on the little sofa, while the old Professor looked on in speechless astonishment.

Of course it became necessary to tell him the whole state of the case. And when he understood that his words had been

the cause of throwing his unseen hearer into the condition of agitation in which he saw her, and why, the old man united his cares to theirs to restore her ; and then, when this had been accomplished, had the great pleasure of repeating all he said in praise of Meo's workmanship to a listener whose eyes repaid him for every word he said, and of finding that his honest verdict had assured to the young sculptor not only a career—but a wife !

And so Meo Varalla's first commission and first love were won !

**THE END.**

*February, 1879.*



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